

DEBATE

THE FIGHT FOR THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL TODAY

— Includes a debate on —
PERMANENT REVOLUTION

**International Communist League
VS
League for the Fourth International**

Table of Contents

ICL Post-Debate Statement
Where Is the LFI Going?..... 2

The Fight for the 4th International Today

Presentation by G. Perrault
for the ICL **3**

Presentation by Abram Negrete
for the LFI..... **10**

Rebuttal by G. Perrault **18**

Rebuttal by Abram Negrete **19**

Select Floor Interventions **20**

Summary by Abram Negrete..... **25**

Summary by G. Perrault..... **26**

On Permanent Revolution: The Fight Against Imperialism Today

Presentation by Anna Mili
for the ICL **29**

Presentation by Jan Norden
for the LFI..... **33**

Select Floor Interventions **37**

Summaries **40**

Appendix

Exchange Between the
ICL and the LFI:
The LFI Chooses Sectarianism..... **42**

Editorial Note

This pamphlet contains transcripts, edited for publication, of the debate held in New York City on 13 January 2024 between the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) and the League for the Fourth International (LFI). The text of the LFI's presentations, rebuttal and summaries was taken from their website. We are also including select floor interventions from both organizations.

Around 250 people attended the debate chaired by retired Marxist historian Bryan Palmer, formerly of Queen's University, Ontario. Other organizations represented at the event included Bolshevik-Leninist Australia, the Bolshevik Tendency, Freedom Socialist Party, the International Bolshevik Tendency and Platypus. The full debate can be viewed at: <https://iclfi.org/usa/events/2024-igdebate>.

ICL Post-Debate Statement

Where Is the LFI Going?

We reprint below an 18 January 2024 Spartacist statement following the debate.

In the January 13 debate between the ICL and LFI, entitled "The Fight for the Fourth International Today," the ICL provided an answer to the problem of revolutionary leadership and a road forward on key questions, from Palestine and China to the fight against imperialist oppression. The LFI for its part showed that it has no serious answers to advance the interests of the international proletariat. ICL bashing was the LFI's core platform. They denied the existence of hegemonic U.S. imperialism's liberal order in the post-Soviet period and put forward no way to break the working class and oppressed from their liberal and reformist misleadership. Instead, they regurgitated timeless Marxoid mantras while at the same time capitulating to liberalism, Stalinism and trade unionism. They also rejected the essence of permanent revolution by denying both the centrality of the national liberation struggle as a motor force for socialist revolution and the necessity for communist leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle in the neocolonial world. This culminated in the grotesque claim that Greece is a sub-imperialist power, not an oppressed country under the boot of U.S. and German imperialism. As Trotsky noted in "Sectarianism, Centrism, and the Fourth International":

"The sectarian looks upon the life of society as a great school, with himself as a teacher there. In his opinion the working class should put aside its less important matters, and assemble in solid rank around his rostrum. Then the task would be solved.

"Though he may swear by Marxism in every sentence, the sectarian is the direct negation of dialectical materialism, which takes experience as its point of departure and always returns to it. A sectarian does not understand the dialectical action and reaction between a finished program and a living—that is to say, imperfect and unfinished—mass struggle."

There are only two roads possible for the LFI. The further coming apart of the U.S.-dominated neoliberal world will only deepen social polarizations. If the LFI maintains its current course, giving a Marxist veneer to liberalism, they have no future but to be swept along to the right. The other road, which would actually advance the fight for the historic interests of the proletariat, is to move toward the ICL and intervene in struggles to chart an independent path forward for the workers and oppressed as the crucial task of reforging the Fourth International today. We sincerely hope they will choose the second. ■

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The Fight for the 4th International Today



Spartacist; Quatrième Internationale (inset)

New York City, 13 January 2024: G. Perrault opens debate with LFI. Reforging the Fourth International is the vital task facing communists today.

PRESENTATION BY G. PERRAULT FOR THE ICL

The world is entering a period of acute crisis. The working class confronts war and ruin on a scale unprecedented in decades. Despite bursts of resistance from the workers movement, it remains far behind in terms of political consciousness, weighed down by leaders who have spent decades preaching class peace. At this turning point in world history, the crisis of proletarian leadership is posed as sharply as ever. Which way forward? This is the theme of today's debate.

Trotsky once wrote that “the essence of sectarianism consists in measuring historical processes at the scale of one's own group.” We will get this from the LFI today. They will try to show that the ICL has done nothing but make mistakes, while the LFI has been correct all along. However, their account is totally divorced from the tasks posed in the broader world. They cannot put our disputes in the context of what needed to be done in the 1990s and what needs to be done today. For them, it is all about a word here or there or tertiary questions which in no way guide the working class

forward. If you think Marxist politics means clinging to orthodox-sounding formulations, you may find their case convincing. But if you focus on the actual theme of this debate, “The Fight for the Fourth International Today,” you will see that they offer nothing different from what the entire left has been peddling for decades: opportunism and sterile dogmatism.

The ICL for its part does not claim to have the answer to every question, and we certainly do not pretend to be a pure and uncontradicted organization. What we can provide—and this will be the focus of my presentation—is precisely an answer to the problem of revolutionary leadership, which has been the source of the crisis for the entire Marxist movement in the last 30 years, *including* our two organizations.

In the Transitional Program, Trotsky wrote:

“The Fourth International does not search after and does not invent panaceas. It takes its stand completely on Marxism as the only revolutionary doctrine that enables one to *understand reality, unearth the cause behind defeats and consciously prepare for victory*” (emphasis added).

It is by these three points which I propose to measure the LFI and ICL: our ability to understand reality, to

unearth the cause behind defeats and to consciously prepare for victory. Only from this standpoint can we go beyond the narrow disputes which have paralyzed our organizations and the entire left and advance the fight for the Fourth International.

1) Understanding Reality

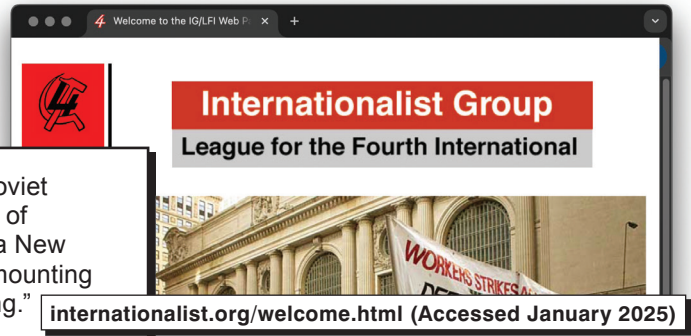
Let's start with reality. Marxism is revolutionary because it roots itself not in abstract ideals but in the material reality of class society. The basic point is simple: Without a correct materialist understanding of the world, it is impossible to guide the proletariat toward its liberation. To understand the current world, it is necessary to go back to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This momentous event totally changed the balance of class forces internationally to the detriment of the working class. It is the failure of Marxists—including the ICL and LFI—to understand this new period which lies at the heart of our disputes and at the heart of the entire left's disorientation.

The problem of the post-Soviet period from the Marxist point of view is the following: It was a period of defeat for workers while at the same time being a period of relative global stability and prosperity. The question is

LFI presents post-Soviet world order as a hair trigger away from World War III. In fact, the other major powers adapted themselves to U.S. dominance for their own gain.

“Following the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the bureaucratically deformed workers states of East Europe in the early 1990s, what emerged was not a New World Order dominated by a single ‘superpower,’ but a mounting disorder of imperialist rivalries and nationalist bloodletting.”

internationalist.org/welcome.html (Accessed January 2025)



how to explain this without renouncing Marxism? It is in fact simple. With the destruction of the USSR, the U.S. emerged as the only superpower; and it was strong enough to force every other country, including its imperialist rivals, to comply with *its* system. The result was to suppress the national conflicts under capitalism—in a limited and temporary way. This explains why the post-Soviet period was relatively stable, why international trade developed to unprecedented levels and why productive forces grew in aggregate.

In many ways, the imperialist world system is not so different from organized crime. The bloodiest conflicts emerge when different gangs are fighting for the top spot. When one gang is much stronger, the criminals come out stronger—certainly bad news—but in the short term violence can go down and business goes up. It can form a cartel.

But in organized crime just as in capitalism, the balance of power is ever changing. Pax Americana was not only very profitable for the imperialists, but also created conditions for strong economic growth in China and other non-imperialist countries. This process has undermined the hegemony of the U.S., and today the world situation is defined by the accelerating breakdown of the post-Soviet world order. The U.S. must now increase the military and economic pressure on its rivals, but also on the countries it today considers allies. This dynamic is at the source of the growing instability in the world. The post-Soviet period was brutal, but it was nothing next to the economic chaos, social decay and wars that will come from its breakdown.

These basic Marxist points on the world situation are essential to understanding political developments nationally and internationally. Taken individually the points I just made are not ground breaking. I am sure you have heard most of them before from var-

ious commentators and others on the left. What is unique in the ICL’s understanding of the world is that we can explain the *evolution* of the world situation through the laws of *class struggle*. We can explain in Marxist terms, *why* the post-Soviet period was reactionary despite its stability, and we can explain *how* it is breaking down today. This is the starting point orienting our work. In other words, we use Marxism to understand reality and it is from this reality that we can put forward a revolutionary course for the working class.

In contrast to this, nothing is Marxist in the way the LFI approaches the world. Their view comes directly from documents written when its founding members were still in the ICL. The method of these documents, carried over to the LFI, is defined by doctrinairism and empirical impressionism. The documents explain the period as follows: the Soviet Union was a counterweight to imperialism, so its destruction will cause more reaction. From this it was predicted that there would be more interimperialist rivalries, that the U.S.-led alliance would collapse, that “free trade” would end and that all this was going to lead to immiseration, war and revolutionary upheavals. The problem is that *nothing* of the sort happened in the last 30 years.

Despite this, the LFI website’s welcome page (you can check on your phone), still dutifully asserts that what emerged after 1990 was *not* “a New World Order dominated by a single ‘superpower,’ but a mounting disorder of imperialist rivalries and nationalist bloodletting.” To this day, the LFI denies that the world situation since the ’90s is defined by U.S. hegemony. This is a problem, *especially* for a party centered in the United States!

So why cling to such an obviously wrong worldview? It is a question of method and purpose. For the LFI, just as for the ICL before, the task of Marxists is to uphold orthodox formulas. But if you understand Marxism as a *guide to class struggle*, then you cannot *force* reality into theory, you must seek to understand reality *through* Marxist theory. So, in part the LFI upholds its wrong view of the world out of doctrinairism—for them fighting revisionism means upholding words. But they also have the problem that this false view has guided their entire practice since their founding and is in *every single one* of their founding documents. To honestly confront these errors is to confront the very basis of their existence—a difficult but necessary thing to do.

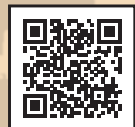
Now, those who pay attention to detail will have noticed that in some

ICL vs LFI Debate THE FIGHT FOR THE 4th INTERNATIONAL TODAY



Watch here:

iclfi.org/usa/events/2024-igdebate



of the LFI's recent articles they tacitly admit that there is such a thing as a U.S.-dominated "World Order." But this solves *nothing*. Their implicit change is simply a response to the reality in front of their nose and not a Marxist understanding of the laws of class struggle. This brings me to the LFI's empirical impressionism, a method which consists in drawing sweeping conclusions from short-term trends.

The LFI looks at the news, sees the war in Ukraine, the increasing tensions with China and declares that World War III will occur as a direct outgrowth of current events. If you take the international situation, take a ruler, and draw a straight line, this makes sense. But once again, this is not Marxism; reality is more complicated. To be a Marxist is not simply to predict catastrophe—although catastrophe certainly *is* on the way. The task is to *guide the proletariat* based on understanding the *laws of class struggle*. The current situation is defined by the relative weakening of U.S. hegemony and the entire imperialist bloc. *Not* by the growth of two rival imperialist blocs vying to redivide the world. This is not just a detail but has important implications, on the tempo and nature of conflicts as well as on the tasks of the working class.

For example, if you think, like the LFI, that the current war in Ukraine will be escalated by the imperialists until they manage to break up Russia and destroy China, then it makes some kind of sense that the working class should support Russia. But if you understand that it is a regional war over who controls Ukraine that broke out because the imperialists *overextended their hand* in East Europe, then it becomes clear that the working class should oppose both sides, that Russia asserting its domination in Ukraine at the expense of the imperialists is *not* a positive development.

Ultimately, whether it is by denying reality or through empiricism, the LFI is navigating without a map, unable to understand the past or predict the future. For them, the world is black and white. There are the good guys and the bad guys, and history moves in neat little boxes along straight lines. This works if you think the job of Marxism is simply to raise immediate demands while proclaiming that socialist revolution is the solution. In that case, contradictions are irrelevant and those who so



It's necessary to understand reality in order to be able to change it. Trump's election was both the product of and an accelerant for the disintegration of the liberal world order from which the tasks of the workers movement must flow.

much as acknowledge their existence are rotten revisionists. But for those seeking to *lead* the working class, this will not do. To you comrades, I strongly encourage the careful study of our conference document "The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony and the Struggle for Workers Power." It does not have all the answers, but I do believe it represents a major step in providing a Marxist program for today's world.

2) Why Does the Working Class Keep Losing?

Let's move on to the second point, how our tendencies explain the defeats since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Of course, one can always say that the working class was defeated because of its pro-capitalist leadership. This is true, but perfectly useless in drawing any kind of lesson.

The starting point must be the concrete situation following the end of the Cold War. The wave of counterrevolutions came with a strong ideological offensive in the form of *liberal triumphalism*. The strength of this offensive was rooted in the material strength of U.S. imperialism. Everywhere it was proclaimed that the whole world needed to accept that there was no alternative to the American model. "Democracy," "the rule of law," "civil liberties," "free movement," "free trade," these were all rallying cries used by U.S. imperialism to justify and extend its domination.

This ideology deeply permeated the workers movement, pushed by the likes of Tony Blair in Britain, John Sweeney

in the U.S. and Gerhard Schröder in Germany. The strength of liberalism explains the weakness of Marxism in the post-Soviet period. It is a poison to the working class because it obscures the class nature of conflicts and makes everything about abstract moral principles.

Now, we often hear the argument that liberalism isn't the problem, that the real danger is right-wing reaction, that to fight liberalism is to help the right. You can be sure that whoever makes this argument is himself a liberal. Here is the basic truth: so long as the working class is under the sway of leaders who look at the world through the lens of universal liberal principles instead of class struggle, the working class *cannot* defeat reaction.

Let's take Trump for example. His strength comes from the discontent with neoliberal America. But the opposition to him has been under the leadership of the very people responsible for neoliberalism. Moreover, it has been organized around the liberal principles of "democracy" and "decency" *not* class struggle. Far from defeating Trump, the so-called resistance has only *strengthened* his appeal. The anti-Trump movement has failed because the workers movement and left have fought him wearing a liberal straitjacket. Defeating Trump requires breaking with liberalism, *this* is the central lesson.

What does the LFI say about defeats in the post-Soviet period? Its founding declaration correctly states that the "fight against revisionism has been a constant in the Marxist movement."

does not have this either. The LFI does not openly support the liberal bourgeoisie—as the Mensheviks after February—but neither does it work to break the working class from its misleaders, as the Bolsheviks did. The role it plays is more akin to the conciliators within the Bolshevik Party during the revolution, such as Zinoviev and Kamenev. They uphold a formally revolutionary program and *criticize* reformists, but the axis of their work is not to *break* the working class from these reformists. This is centrism, and it permeates everything the LFI does.

To make the difference between our two approaches concrete, I will go through some of the major political questions in the current period. In every case, you will see the same pattern. The ICL seeks to *advance* working-class struggle and *break* the influence of its reformist leaders. The LFI either seeks to advance struggle while *accepting* the leadership of the reformists or denounces the reformists while *standing aside* from struggle. Whether it is through opportunism or sectarianism, the LFI's program always leaves the reformists in charge of the struggle.

The Black Question in the U.S.

Since we are in the U.S., let's start with the black question in the United States.

Going all the way back to the Civil War era, reliance on the liberal wing of the American bourgeoisie has held back the struggle for black liberation. Ending black oppression requires rad-

ical revolutionary measures, which the capitalist class will never accept. The movement for black liberation cannot be victorious as long as it is tied in any way to this class. From this, it is obvious that the task of revolutionaries is to *break the chains* tying the black movement to the liberal bourgeoisie.

Now let's see how this played out in the 2020 BLM movement provoked by the murder of George Floyd. The movement itself was dominated by liberal politics and was supported by some of the most reviled Democrats and Republicans. Most of the labor movement and left openly defended the coalition between black activists and capitalist politicians, using the movement to build Joe Biden's election campaign. Here we have our Mensheviks. What about the LFI? It correctly recognized that the reformists crossed the class line, seeking a "political alliance with bourgeois liberal forces." But if you look at their intervention, it is obvious that its purpose was not to *break* this political alliance between labor and the liberals! This is centrism: Seeing the problem but doing nothing to solve it.

Let me explain. One of the LFI's main demands is for labor actions against police brutality. The working class *does* need to be brought into the fight, but the whole question is *under which program?* A liberal one—leading to the Democratic Party—or a Marxist one—leading to black liberation? The LFI is quite explicit that its model for working-class action in defense of black people is the *liberal* rally organized by the ILWU on Juneteenth of

2020. So, on one hand, they say "break with the *Democrats*," but on the other they promote politics and leaders that bring workers straight into the Democratic Party. Instead of showing how a real working-class fight to defend black people requires a completely *different leadership*, it encourages the actions of the *current* leadership. It's very simple: The leaders of the ILWU are an *obstacle* to black liberation, but the LFI nonetheless hails their liberal rallies as some kind of step in the right direction! The LFI is not missing a word here or there—it is building a labor wing of the BLM popular front. Its perspective *guarantees* disaster for black people.

Now, I am sure most of you know that the ICL imploded in 2020 and was utterly paralyzed during this historic movement. But unlike the LFI, the ICL *drew lessons* from this betrayal. Out of the struggles which emerged in our ranks, we have reasserted the fundamental task of Marxists toward the movement against police brutality: to *advance the struggle* while showing *in practice* that victory requires a *totally different track*, that is a revolutionary break with liberal politics.

Today, the movement against police brutality is utterly demoralized. The most atrocious crimes provoke only pitiful demonstrations. How to move forward? We propose to rebuild the movement by organizing it around the demand to "open all police archives." It is a demand which is popular—it intersects the felt sentiment in the black population and beyond. But it is also a demand whose pursuit *will directly*



Bartow, Florida, April 2024: Spartacists join rally outside courthouse in defense of Antwan Glover, brutalized by police. SL-initiated united-front campaign to "open all police archives" is way to rebuild movement against racist cop terror while exposing liberal politicians.

WV Photo

Spartacist League/U.S.
Statement
28 August 2023

Mississippi Atrocity Only Tip of the Iceberg

Open All Police Archives!

A Proposal to Rebuild the Movement

For the longstanding "crime" in racist capitalist America of a black man getting too close to a white woman, six Mississippi cops, all labeled the "Goon Squad," inflicted and terrorized two hours of perverse racist sexual assault and beating, then terrorized black communities in the South a century ago. In an attempt to cover for their grotesque crimes, these cops did what cops normally do: they planted drugs on their victims. Earlier this month, in what seems like an anomaly to most, the six white cops pled guilty to assaulting Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker. Make no mistake, it's not a matter of a few bad apples, states of the South. The entire capitalist state is the goon squad for the racist capitalist rulers and commits crimes like this on a regular basis. Recall that it was five black cops that tortured and murdered Tyre Nichols in Memphis, Tennessee, two weeks ago. Cops of various backgrounds were beating, dragging, and kicking black people and others for "loitering" in Atlanta and Pittsburgh, California, for hunting down and same Fulton County Jail in Georgia where Trump's mugshot was taken is notorious for the many gruesome deaths of mainly black prisoners. These and countless other examples show that what was exposed in Mississippi is only the tip of the iceberg. **Enough! The true crimes of the capitalist state must be exposed to all!**

Everyone can see that the struggle against police brutality is at a standstill. Three years ago, there was an enormous wall of anger, with millions protesting against racist cop killings. Yet today, there is no real fightback. So, what

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Now let's move on to another flash-point, the Ukraine war. Here the LFI and ICL have fundamentally different

Just Break Already!

- For a clean break with the Democrats now—
Throw out the electeds!
- Workers need their own candidate—
No support to Biden! Vote Party for
Socialism and Liberation!
- For anti-imperialist struggle to free
Palestine!
- Fight for black liberation!

JOIN US!



ICL fights for subjective revolutionaries in DSA to effect a complete break with the Democrats; LFI writes off all members of DSA as hopeless lackeys of U.S. imperialism.



encourage left-wing pro-Palestinian elements in the DSA to fight for *a split* with the Democratic Party. We show how the defense of Palestine is directly *undermined* by *unity* with Democrats. The LFI has not yet commented on our article, but you don't need to be a genius to know what they will say. They will no doubt denounce us as opportunists for seeking to intervene in the DSA at all. It may sound very radical to simply yell at DSA members that they are part of the Democratic Party, but it does nothing to exploit the very real contradiction which exists among its members—many of whom consider themselves communists.

Far from being “hard,” the LFI intervention on Palestine does absolutely nothing to break the movement from the clutches of either Hamas or the Democrats. The LFI *sees* that these two forces are obstacles to Palestinian liberation, they *know* that to be successful the movement needs to be broken from their leadership, but they *refuse* to direct their entire energy to fight for this break!

By this point, I hope I do not need to summarize the two different approaches, and that you can start seeing it for yourselves. It always comes down to the two interrelated questions “how to move the struggle forward?”, “how to forge a communist leadership?”

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to recall the following words from Trotsky:

“How the New International will take form, through what stages it will pass,

what final shape it will assume—this no one can foretell today. And, indeed, there is no need to do so: historical events will show us. But it is necessary to begin by proclaiming a *program* that meets the tasks of our epoch. On the basis of this program it is necessary to mobilize the co-thinkers, the pioneers of the New International. No other road is possible.”

This is precisely what I have sought to put forward today, a *program for reorganizing the Fourth International*. My presentation was rooted in a Marxist understanding of the world, it identified the main reasons for the defeats suffered by the working class in the post-Soviet period, and most importantly it provided *a road to victory* which advances the interests of the working class *right now*, while also driving a wedge against liberalism, Stalinism and nationalism. It is around this basic approach that we seek to win co-thinkers and play a role in regrouping revolutionary forces internationally.

My presentation today showed that there are indeed fundamental differences between the LFI and ICL. At the same time—whether they like it or not—the LFI is not so different from the ICL three years ago. In this sense, we think that despite all the bad blood and bitterness between us it is entirely possible to move closer to each other through serious political discussion. We will continue to fight for this as we will also continue to seek joint action with the LFI whenever possible.

The task at hand is urgent—enough sectarian squabbling! Join us in the fight to reforge the Fourth International!

PRESENTATION BY ABRAM NEGRETE FOR THE LEAGUE FOR THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

I wanted to thank Bryan for chairing today's debate and also all of the people from both organizations who worked really hard on the technical and other arrangements.

I also wanted to thank comrade Perreault for helping to make my job up here somewhat easier—actually, a lot easier.

So the title of today's debate, as you're aware, is “The Fight for the Fourth International Today,” in other words, the World Party of Socialist Revolution, which was founded by Leon Trotsky and his co-thinkers in 1938 and was destroyed in 1951-53 by the revisionist current within the Fourth International that came to be known as “Pabloism,” after the then-International Secretary of the Fourth International, Michel Pablo.

The central thesis of the founding program of the Fourth International, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, known as the Transitional Program, is that the crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership. Interestingly, that thesis, and defending it or attacking it—or dismissing it, saying it was obsolete—was one of the early political disputes between us and the old ICL. Well, let's call it the “middle-old” ICL or something like

that, before the current “born-again” ICL. After our expulsion in 1996, early on, we had to defend, against a revisionist attack by the ICL, that concept at the heart of the Transitional Program. You can read about it in *The Internationalist* No. 5, in an article called “In Defense of the Transitional Program.”

I think that if we look at the world today, we can certainly see that this thesis is as urgent as ever, and I would argue even more urgent. We have the war on Gaza, a genocidal war against the Palestinian people. And this is a U.S. war, a U.S./Israel genocidal war on Gaza, and it is proceeding every day. The fact that it is a U.S. war is of enormous importance and it's something that the LFI emphasizes. The ICL? I'm not sure if they've ever even said that.

But in any case: our line is to defend Gaza and to defeat the U.S./Israel genocidal war and to bring out the power of the international working class. From here to Portland to Italy to Sydney and Melbourne and elsewhere, LFI comrades are part of the fight to defend the Palestinian people, to defeat the witch hunts against defenders of the Palestinian people and to stop the flow of arms to this genocidal war. We have been part of those mobilizations and out in the hallway, you can see a poster about the motions that our comrades in Portland,

Ukrainian, Russian Workers: Turn the Guns Against Your Rulers!



**Spartacist,
August 2022**

at its source, through socialist revolutions in the imperialist centers. For workers revolution in the U.S. For the Soviet Union. For the United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis! This is only one progressive way forward in the war between Ukraine and Russia: to turn this war between two capitalist classes into a civil war where workers overthrow both capitalist classes. We call on the soldiers and workers of Ukraine and Russia: *Fraternize! Turn the guns against your exploiters!*

Down With the EU and NATO!

Oregon have initiated and that were passed for the stopping of arms shipments by construction workers unions on the basis of comrades' struggle in the Painters union and elsewhere; for a break with the Democratic Party and the forging of a class-struggle workers party, a motion that was passed in the Painters union some years ago and has been the basis for much of their work.

On the Ukraine war, as explained in *The Internationalist*, this went from the original nationalist war between two non-imperialist, capitalist states to



“Calling for military defense of Russia against the U.S./NATO imperialist onslaught in no way implies one iota of political support to the country's bourgeois government. In the lead-up to the imperialist World War II, the Trotskyists defended Ethiopia, ruled over by the slave-owning emperor Haile Selassie, against Italian imperialism which sought to turn the only independent African country into a colony. In 1939, Trotsky called on Chinese communists to defend China, ruled over by Chiang Kai-shek, the butcher of Shanghai, against Japanese imperialism.”

The Internationalist, May-October 2022

Universal History Archive

Nanjing Massacre, 1937. LFI absurdly compares Ukraine receiving U.S. military support with Japan's invasion of China.

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No. 67-68 Double Issue May-October 2022 \$1

Not Bourgeois Nationalism But International Proletarian Revolution
Defeat the Imperialist War Drive and U.S./NATO Proxy Regime in Ukraine
Defend Russia, China Against War-Crazed U.S. Rulers

May-October 2022

ICL calls on Russian and Ukrainian workers to turn war between two capitalist classes into a civil war where workers overthrow their respective rulers. LFI calls for Russian victory, i.e., the national oppression of Ukrainians by Russia.

a full-on U.S./NATO proxy war against Russia, which is a way station—as the imperialist military and political chiefs say—towards war against China. That war is aimed in large part against China, something that we also rarely, if ever, hear from the ICL. And this is part of a drive by U.S. imperialism, heading towards World War III. Only socialist revolution can stop that world war.

Now, our position with regard to the Ukraine war: revolutionaries stand for the defeat of the imperialists and for the military defense of those targeted by them, Russia and the Chinese deformed workers state. You will have noticed that comrade Perrault said that the war in Ukraine is a proxy war between NATO and Russia. The ICL states correctly that Russia is not an imperialist country. It states correctly, obviously, that NATO is a military alliance of imperialist countries headed by the U.S. Not only that, it's headed by a liberal party, the Democratic Party.

Despite this, the ICL refuses to defend the *targets* of that imperialist war. It takes a neutralist position, saying it's a war between two “gangs of thugs.” A lot of liberals say that, in fact I think I hear that from liberals pretty much every day: just a gang of thugs on one side and just a gang of thugs on the other side. So apparently the defeat of Russia by the imperialists would be a matter of indifference.

Now we hear about this “unipolar world.” Well, in fact, after the counter-revolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union there was considerable *disunity* amongst the imperialists. Perhaps not as much as foreseen in the prognosis

of a memorandum from 1994 or a document from 1992, but there was something called the Yugoslavia War, you may have heard of it. There was the Iraq War—where there was not unity amongst the imperialists—and a whole bunch of other stuff.

But where you *do* get something approximating that picture is right now with the U.S./NATO imperialist war against Russia, in which the ICL refuses to defend the targets of the imperialist onslaught—and uses liberal verbiage to promote that position. All right, let's move on, there's a lot to say and not much time. We give no political support, obviously, to the bourgeois government of Putin, but we call for bringing out the power of the working class to stop the arms shipments to the imperialists' proxies, the Ukraine government.

Now, on the basis of what program, based on historical experience, can the Fourth International be reformed? Comrade Perrault said, and I think correctly, that the question of which program is of great importance. So let me just say, and I said this at an SL forum: when I was recruited to the SL youth group in 1972-73, at that time the Socialist Workers Party claimed to be Trotskyist, and they called us—guess what? Three guesses, starts with an “s.” “Secretarians.” But they tooth and nail denied that they were abandoning Trotskyism. They had some very intelligent people, with writers—[SWP theorist] Joseph Hansen was very competent, and a bunch of others—who would contest it every time that we said, “You're abandoning the Trotskyist program.”

Until in the early '80s, after a study of the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” and after polemics on this by Doug Jenness and polemics on this by other leaders of the SWP, they came out in 1982 with a speech by Jack Barnes called “Their Trotsky and Ours,” where they said: You know what? We're *not* Trotskyists. Trotskyism is ultra-left sectarianism. And that permanent revolution thing? No good. And guess what? We've discovered the importance of supporting the Freedom Charter in South Africa and the ANC. That was an important thing.

Now, with the Spartacist League and the ICL: we were expelled in 1996 on frame-up charges, right? [Turning to Perrault:] They were frame-up charges, right? Comrade Perrault says “Right,

they were.” Thank you. Listen to that. In other words, what's been said about us for 28 years was a lie. You understand that? But let's move on from that. We said—year after year—and we documented the abandonment of one key position after another by the ICL. But they denied that they were abandoning the historic program of Spartacism.

Born-Again ICL vs. Historic Spartacist Program

But now we have a new revelation. Does everybody have their *Spartacist* 68? [Holds it up.] I very much agree with comrade Perrault that it should be studied carefully—actually, very carefully. And here, what it says is: You know what? The Spartacist tendency was deformed from birth; we were wrong on just about everything, they say. As for your paper, the paper of one section or another [of the ICL], we renounce that paper back to the beginning, they say. They have junked and they're in the process of junking, in a kaleidoscopic, dizzying way, one part of that program after another.

It's far from over. I said at one of the ICL's forums, in May: the members of the Spartacist League and the ICL do not know what their politics will be next week or next month or next year, because they're changing so rapidly.

But in any event, *that* debate is over. The historic program of Spartacism is *ours*. They have renounced it, they say that it was a betrayal, they say it was a betrayal on one thing after another, they throw it into the garbage. But we

maintain that the historic program of Spartacism is crucial and vital to reforging the Fourth International.

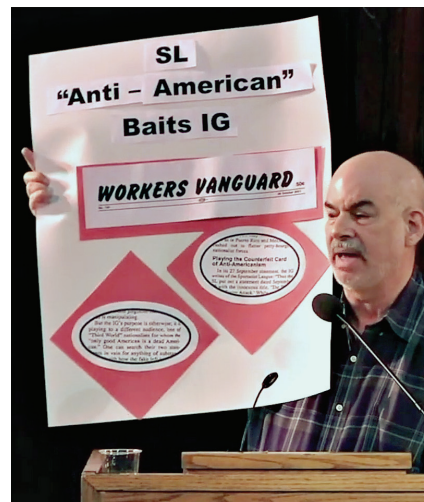
So *that's* what the debate is about. Is the historic program of Spartacism—which was not the invention of some person in a fever dream, it was the distillation of decades of bloody struggles of the oppressed and the lessons of the past history of the Fourth International and the communist movement. Is the historic program of Spartacism fundamental to reforging the Fourth International? We say *yes*—and they say *no*. They say no.

Well, at least that's out of the way.

So, what was the foundation of the Spartacist tendency? It came out of the Socialist Workers Party and something called the Revolutionary Tendency (RT), as most of the people here know. It was a group of young revolutionaries; some had been Shachtmanites, but the experience of the Hungarian Revolution [of 1956] taught them a thing or two. For example, on the “Russian Question.” And they came over to the Socialist Workers Party. So when the challenge of the Cuban Revolution arose, they were pretty well armed to have a revolutionary Marxist position, of militant defense of Cuba, but understanding that it was in the process of consolidating as a deformed workers state. And that a political revolution by the proletariat was necessary to open the road to socialism, to establish workers democracy based on workers soviets and a policy of revolutionary internationalism to expand the revolution. They rejected the suicidal strategy of guerrilla warfare.

And the Russian Question became key for the Spartacist tendency throughout its history. The Russian Question in the Soviet Union, the Russian Question in Vietnam, the Russian Question in Cuba, the Russian Question *in Poland*—which the ICL is now renouncing, what the Spartacist tendency had to say about Poland at the crucial moment of 1981 [when the U.S.-backed clerical-nationalist Solidarność movement was making a bid for power]. Openly.

Two: the black question in the United States, key to proletarian revolution—the specific nature of U.S. society, a society in which black oppression lies at the *root* of the origins of this society and at the heart of almost every political question in this society, every social question. The program of revolutionary integrationism, in opposition



Spartacist video

One of comrade Negrete's “show and tell” posters of the ICL's past crimes.

to false roads like black nationalism or following the liberal leadership of the liberal pro-Democratic Party leaders of the official civil rights movement. The RT fought inside the Socialist Workers Party, to get the activists from the SWP down there [i.e., into the South] into the movement, to get them on the buses, get them into the streets with the program that we now synthesize as “black liberation through socialist revolution.”

This was enormously important for arming the Spartacist tendency in the future, not only on the black question and in the extremely important and historic mobilizations to stop the Ku Klux Klan, for example, in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere. But also on other questions of special oppression, like the woman question, the fight for women’s liberation through socialist revolution. And this led to one of the most important Marxist journals, in my opinion, of the postwar period, *Women and Revolution*. What’s your position on that journal? I’d like to hear. Do you renounce that as well? Somebody answer that question today, please. Because we consider *W&R*, until pretty close to the end of it, ours in the sense of part of our political legacy. What’s your line on that? It also was key to other questions of understanding the Leninist party as the “tribune of the people,” the tribune of the oppressed. This was key, for example, to the historic fusion with the former Lavender and Red Union, which changed its name to Red Flag Union, a gay revolutionary Marxist group.

And then the struggle against Pabloism was the third, if you like, “whale” of the RT; the struggle against Pabloism, the struggle against the liquidation of the independent revolutionary Marxist party as the essential instrument for leading the proletariat and the oppressed to victory, and [against] the tailism of the existing leaderships by the liquidationist leaders of the [post-WWII] Fourth International.

Can people get their reading for today out, please? *Spartacist* 68 and “The LFI Chooses Sectarianism” (*Spartacist* supplement, 3 November 2023). [Shows cover of *Spartacist* No. 68.] So we read here, “A Program for the Fourth International,” and I’m like, wow! I kind of thought there was one already, the Transitional Program, but this ought to be interesting. I’d like to see what it has to say about the black question

From *Spartacist* (English Edition) No. 68, September 2023

The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power

A PROGRAM FOR THE
FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

spartacist.org/en/68/breakdown

in the United States, for example, the citadel of world imperialism; about the struggle in the United States for black liberation, which was one of the pillars of the RT. Guess how much it has to say about that? *Nothing*. Please explain why. Why does the “Program for the Fourth International,” according to you, not mention the struggle for black liberation in the United States one time? Not once. Please explain.

Second question: the struggle against Pabloism. If you have to reforge the Fourth International, why is that? It took us a while to settle on that word, didn’t it, comrades who remember, and who want to remember. We had “rebirth of the Fourth International,” “reconstruct the Fourth International,” that didn’t work—I don’t have time to explain why—we came up with the somewhat exotic term “reforge.” But in any case, why? Not a word about it.

What about the Cuban Revolution and its lessons? Cuba is mentioned in a few lists of countries. The Cuban Revolution is mentioned in a photo caption, on page 42. Please open to page 42. You can do it too, you know, it’s yours. We’ve studied it. This is the only place that the Cuban Revolution is mentioned, in a photo caption, to make fun of the Spartacist tendency, [the photo and caption are placed next to the sub-head] “Deformed at Birth.” Get it? You know, like a deformed workers state—isn’t that funny? That is the only time the Cuban Revolution is mentioned.

The Cuban Revolution is under threat right now. What’s your line? What is

your line on the riots in Cuba in July 2021, in which counterrevolutionary instigators took advantage of economic crisis. Do you consider the question of defense of the Cuban Revolution in the here and now—not in “doctrinal abstractions” of orthodox “sectarians,” but now—do you consider it worthy of inclusion in what you call the “Program for the Fourth International”? If so, why is it not here? If not, please explain.

Bringing the Revolutionary Program into the Class Struggle

So I was having some trouble, quite a bit of trouble, actually, preparing for this debate for one reason, in one aspect. It was fun in a lot of ways. But how would one explain this to young people who want to figure out what is this all about?

When I was being recruited away from Guevarism, from Stalinism, in high school, me and my best friend, we used to get all the leftist papers and try to figure out what they were talking about—like, what the hell is this, I don’t understand this stuff. We had to read [Lenin’s] *Two Tactics* at an SL study group. The person who gave it might be here. There was a group in *Two Tactics* called Osvobozhdeniye—“what the hell is that?” What is the “revolutionary dictatorship,” etc. We read a little red [Spartacist] pamphlet called “Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution” by Leon Trotsky, which contrasts the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship [of the proletariat and peasantry]” formula of Lenin to the permanent revolution



Internationalist



Peg Hunter

Left: IG at Juneteenth 2020 march, NYC. Right: ILWU-led Juneteenth 2020 work stoppage/protest in Oakland. IG attempts to marry calls for revolution with cheering ILWU bureaucracy's liberal BLM action.

and to the Mensheviks. That was our main reading for one of the study groups of the SL/RCY study groups. [The Revolutionary Communist Youth was the Spartacist League's youth section at that time.] But why, we wondered, were people arguing about such things? What did it mean in politics today? A lot of people probably wonder about that today.

So I was trying to think of some kind of analogy and I wasn't doing so well. First I thought: this *Spartacist* 68, the new revelation and the new evangel, I guess, has a bunch of things to say, but they're mainly about the ICL and how it screwed up in a whole lot of ways. And I was wondering, how would one explain this?

And a funny thing happened on the way to the forum—I mean, the debate. A guy came up to me, kind of a little guy, and he said, "Are you going to the debate?" I said, "I am." And he said, "I don't understand what is happening between your group and their group. Could you please explain?" And I thought I should try to boil it down somehow, so I came up with an analogy of a company that builds bridges and when asked, "Well, what's your experience building bridges? Like, what's your record, say for the past 30 years?" "Oh, all our bridges fell down, but now we're very good at building bridges—we hope." And I thought, no, that's not such a good one, maybe you should use one with doctors, no, that's not so good. So I thought: why not make it real?

Comrade Perrault is right and Bryan

is right, they both said it or implied it: that this is going to be—it is already, but it will increasingly be—a turbulent period. There's going to be a lot of struggles. So I thought: why not imagine that this audience consists of workers involved in a really hot struggle, who are getting fed up with their reformist leaders and looking for something like revolutionary leadership, and they are comparing the two organizations. And they say: Listen, we want some kind of radical leadership, but we want to know who is who and what is your experience, in the sense of not how old you are and how many years you've lived, but what is your record?

We would say: The LFI has fought seriously, consistently and systematically; we have written and we have fought in the class struggle to bring the revolutionary program of Trotskyism into the living class struggle.

They might say to us: Someone told us you lead some workers out in Portland. Is anybody from Portland here? Could you stand up? [A comrade from Portland stands up.] Thank you. You can talk to her and ask—we would say to these workers—she can tell you about the struggle to stop the fascists, Portland Labor Against the Fascists, and the role of class-struggle militants. [These workers might ask:] How was that connected to fighting against the union bureaucracy tying the Painters union and other unions to the bosses' Democratic Party? What about the motions that were just passed in the Ironworkers and the Painters, not just saying that they

stand for stopping the arms shipments, but calling on the labor movement to stop the arms shipments—how did that happen? What about the struggle to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, are there some lessons out there? Weren't you guys (in the Painter's union it's mainly guys) in a pre-strike situation recently—what did you do about that? How is it connected to the struggle against the Democratic Party mayor? And what about when Portland was occupied by the feds, pretty much, and by "Teargas Ted" Wheeler, the Democratic Party mayor, during the mass upheaval against racist police terror after the racist murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many others?

There's a poster display out there [in the hall], I invite you to see it.

How about in Mexico, like in the Oaxaca struggles, the struggles over Ayotzinapa, and there's a strike right now in Mexico City. How about that huge UNAM [National Autonomous University of Mexico] strike in 1999 to 2000? Bringing the Trotskyist program, the Transitional Program, into the class struggle—did you from the LFI have anything like that, in that huge strike at the largest university in Latin America, when the World Bank, a pillar of the liberal order indeed, ordered the Mexican government to impose tuition?

Is anybody here from Mexico? Can you stand up, please? [ICL member in audience laughs.] It's real funny—because bringing the Transitional Program into that struggle meant sparking workers defense guards. Look it up in

your Transitional Program, that's the old program for the Fourth International, not this one. They [our comrades in Mexico] sparked, they caused to be organized workers defense guards, which defended the strike 24 hours a day when the army, in July of 1999, threatened to invade the largest university in Latin America. And as a result of that, UNAM is still free...you know, a very "sectarian" action.

Speaking of university strikes, how about the one here in New York, there was a big university strike about two years ago. Was anybody here in that strike? Stand up if you were. I'm serious, let's see the "sectarians." [More than a dozen supporters of the IG and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth stand up.] What did you fight for? Picket lines mean don't cross. Is that part of the program? It's very "abstract," it's an "abstract orthodox dogma." Fighting for that against the DSA, your [the ICL's] new friends, or hoped-for friends. "Revolutionaries in the DSA"—give me a break. It's a faction of the imperialist government party, the war criminal party. Don't tell me about revolutionaries in the party of *genocide*, the party of the Vietnam War and napalm and Hiroshima. If they had an ounce of revolutionary in them, they would not be in that organization. Opportunism—yes, we call it that.

But fighting against the DSA and the Democratic Party in that strike, which led to "Shut It Down" on December 8 [2021], where the picket line—the SL was there, the only thing they were doing, even when people were crashing through the picket line, literally, was trying to get people to take their nutty (that's a polite word for it) lockdown leaflet. That was the only thing they did there. But as a result of [the "Shut It Down" picket line] that strike won. This is connected to the program.

What about the McCarthyite witch hunts right now against defenders of the Palestinian people? Anybody here been involved in the struggle against that? I'm going to ask you to stand up again. [Again, more than a dozen supporters of the IG and RIY stand up.] What about organizing immigrant workers, one of the most exploited and oppressed sectors of the proletariat in this city? What about Hot and Crusty, is the former vice president of the union here? Would you stand up? [Comrade stands up.] He was fired and he's been

fired many times for organizing unions, and he was part of the struggle at the Hot and Crusty [bakery/restaurant] to put into effect the slogan "Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants," and to fight against the union bureaucracy which turns its back on them. Hot and Crusty, Bröd Kitchen, B&H, Cabricanecos, Liberato restaurant: in each of these, the youth organization and the IG have brought the comrades into it, to fight for the revolutionary program.

ICL: Again and Again, We Betrayed—Now Follow Us!

By the way, when our comrades were arrested in Mexico [in February 2000] in the UNAM strike, there was only one organization that had no one arrested. Three guesses. Yes, the ICL. Why? Three guesses. When the cops arrived on the campus to arrest 1,000 students, the ICL wasn't there. What a surprise. Isn't that a big surprise?

So these workers then want to know: What about the mass upsurge against the racist police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor? *Well, we collapsed*, says the ICL. You mean you weren't there at all? Did you publish something? *No*. Did you post something? *No*. Did you put out a leaflet? *No*. Why? *Well, we'll get to that in a second. One could go on. What about 9/11? We'll talk about that later.*

Then they say, well, what were you doing for the past 30 years? *Well, it's all in Spartacist: we were betraying.* Wait a minute, you betrayed for 30 years? *Yes*, according to you. Seriously? What were you doing in your organization? *Well, we were having a whole lot of turmoil and a lot of fights, lots and lots of fights, for 30 years, OK?* What did those fights consist of? *Oh, it doesn't matter, it's not very interesting. (I could go through them all, said comrade Perrault in a report which is published here, but they're not very interesting.) They're all basically meaningless.* So what you're talking about, you devoured yourselves for 30 years. *Yes—now we're back, OK?*—they say. They were very busy.

After two years, they came out with *Workers Vanguard*. This is the first issue that came out, No. 1177 [17 March 2023]. And in that issue, what did they do? They were very productive. They listed their betrayals: eight betrayals. Eight. On what? According to them, on the black question; according to them,

on the trade-union question; according to them, on six other questions. And then they came out with another issue, which listed more betrayals. On what questions? On the woman question, for example, and other questions.

So if these workers then asked: You're saying that you betrayed over and over and over again. How about on Haiti, when you supported the U.S. imperialist occupation? Why did that happen? *Oh, we don't really want to talk about that very much. We were wrong, the IG was right.* But why did it happen? *Hmm, maybe because of a memorandum that people voted for 25 years before that, the memorandum made us do it.* And the reason why you betrayed on these other questions? *Well, we were really like the IG, you know; both of us supported the same memorandum and the same tasks and perspectives document.*

Now sometimes, tasks and perspectives documents and memorandums can have some good aspects of their prognoses and some not so accurate aspects. But the argument that this is the essential question and if you get your prognoses wrong, everything is garbage and your program is garbage, this is the argument that was used after World War II when Trotsky's prognoses of the post-World War II period were largely not confirmed. In reality it was used by whom? It was used by the Goldman-Morrow faction in the Socialist Workers Party. And what was their program? "Democracy." They said: "The Trotskyists must be the best fighters for democracy"—democracy—oh!—in general. In Spanish, the expression is that democracy "*tiene nombre y apellido*," it has a first and last name: there's bourgeois democracy, there's proletarian democracy. But the Goldman-Morrow faction said democracy in general. The Cochran-Clarke [faction in 1952-53], during the Pablo fight, they also said that the prognoses of the SWP and Trotsky did not come true in some considerable part and therefore the program was off. Where was the program, the fundamental programmatic questions, determined by this?

The Truth About the ICL's Brazil Betrayal

But back to the workers asking these questions: Your organization, they would say [to the ICL], gave rise to another organization. How did that happen? *Well, we expelled them back*

in 1996. Why did you do that? You also organized some trials and stuff? *Yeah, we did that; we're investigating that.* Well, what do you think about it? *Well, it was unprincipled. The fight against them was unprincipled.* Really? Why? *Oh, because both they and us voted for the same memorandum.* The memorandum made you do it? Why did it happen? *I don't know—maybe you could ask some of the people in this room who did it. Because they're here.*

What about the stuff in Brazil: is it true that what you did in Brazil was unprincipled? *Yeah, it's true.* It's true, isn't it? [Turning to Perrault:] Is it true? Comrade Perrault is saying "yes," and he's written it. Well, why did it happen? Why did that happen? *We're not sure yet, but it was unprincipled.* Why? *Because both sides voted for the same document.* Oh, did the comrades in Brazil vote for that document? *No, they weren't around at that time.* They were busy organizing illegal strikes—well, they weren't illegal anymore, but against the military and [in the early '90s] they were in a centrist organization called Causa Operária.

What was going on when that struggle [in 1996] happened? *Oh, that's the past. We don't want to talk about the past. We're all about the "now."* What did you do when those comrades were attacked by the bourgeois state, which put out an order for the "search and seizure" of their documents, of their bulletin, of their union leaflet? What did you do? Did you defend them, or did you side with the other side? There is an answer to that.

One of the people involved in the ICL's actions, that the ICL now says that we are correct to still be "outraged" about their actions in 1996—Let me repeat that: that we are correct to still be outraged by their actions in Brazil. In other words, what they were saying for 28 years was a lie, what we were saying was true. "Oh, but that's old history and besides, you're a bunch of hidebound doctrinaires." Oh really? Were there no consequences?

I'm going to do this now. Can you please bring me that poster? [Holds up poster with headline "Brazil: ICL Seeks to Sabotage Defense of Trotskyist Workers," with photos and documents on the campaign to remove police from the Volta Redonda Municipal Workers Union and quotations from *Workers Vanguard* (2 January 1998) denounc-

ing the Brazilian comrades' defense campaign.]

The bourgeois state, you've heard of it? It sent one of its agents to the offices of the comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, and they had a "search and seizure" order for every copy of their leaflet. This came from a suit which was demanding the names of all of the members of the trade-union committee, or caucus, and the order threatened, was associated with the threat to seize all of the belongings of the caucus and of the union president. And we organized an international defense campaign to try to get unions to support them. We're talking about real people, we're not talking about words on paper. Real people with names like Jorge Oliveira, the target of this suit, a black worker who worked 25 years as a railway man at the largest steel company in Latin America, which is not a doctrinal invention written on paper. It's not about words on paper.

And what did the ICL say?

[This was an] "*ação de busca e apreensão*," an "action for search and seizure," right? Unions around the world were signing up to defend them [the Brazilian comrades], in South Africa, in El Salvador and elsewhere, on the basis of our work. The ICL tried to *stop* people from defending them. Is that statement true? Yes, it is true. They called the defense campaign a "cynical sham." And they called the comrades—taking words virtually verbatim from the pro-cop grouping in Volta Redonda headed by Artur Fernandes—they called them "dangerous hustlers." You want to defend a "dangerous hustler" in a campaign which is a "cynical sham"? What's your line on this? [Turning to Perrault.] What's your line on this? Please respond.

Now these workers in this room [in the scenario of a group of workers posing questions], when confronted by the ICL, might very well say: Well, what do you have to say about that? And the ICL would probably say: *That was a long time ago, we're all about the "now."* You ready to follow us now? *We betrayed, we betrayed this way, and this way, and this way, and this way, and this way, and this way—now follow us! Because since the first of September 2023, when this [Spartacist No. 68] was published, now it's all OK. You ready to follow us?* I don't think so. *Well, we're investigating it.* One certainly hopes so; one

looks forward to seeing the results of those investigations.

They're going to say, "But what about the program?" We've been talking about program. Program is real—when you fight for it.

Pushing the "Anti-Imperialist United Front"

But what about the revelations in here [Spartacist No. 68]? Why, according to them, was the Spartacist tendency "deformed" since birth? Jim Robertson, they say, did not understand the permanent revolution or the national question, and the "revisionist" and reactionary positions, etcetera, meant that the Spartacist tendency was deformed from birth. So, a kind suggestion: why don't you change the name of your journal? Change it.

How is that? We're going to hear about some of this in the second part of the debate. What is this all about? What does it come down to, as a pompous SLer used to like to say to me, "when the rubber hits the road"? It comes down to the "anti-imperialist united front."

They have resuscitated something which even most Trotskyists are not particularly aware of, or would-be Trotskyists: the "anti-imperialist united front" from the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. And they're determined to "defend" the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. We always used to say that we stand on the first four Congresses of the Communist International, with reservations on the fourth. The discussion on the workers government [slogan] was very confused, Zinoviev was all over the map.

And what about the "Theses on the Eastern Question" [from the Comintern's Fourth Congress]? I used to hear about that a lot, from Guillermo Lora, head of the Bolivian POR. Why? Because he's got a pamphlet (I can give it to you as a present) called "The Anti-Imperialist Front": because he dug those theses up to justify his class-collaborationist Frente Revolucionario Antiimperialista with the president—former president—of Bolivia.

Because in the Trotskyist movement, the "Theses on the Orient" or "Eastern Question" (originally it was called by that term, "Theses on the Orient") had not been mentioned at the First Congress [1938] of the Fourth International nor in its documents nor at the Second Congress [1946] nor in the documents

Mexico City, March 2024: AMLO's handpicked successor, Claudia Sheinbaum, launches presidential campaign. To break masses from populism, communists must fight for leadership of anti-imperialist movement. LFI, downplaying extent of illusions in populism, rejects this perspective.



Luis Cortes/Reuters; Quetzalli Nichte-Ha/Reuters (inset)

of the SWP. But they were mentioned at the Third Congress, by a man called Michel Pablo. Why? In order to justify a political bloc with the nationalist party [in Bolivia].

Well, we would never do something like that, might say the ICL, mightn't they? Well, they might—but *they don't*. To the contrary, they want an anti-imperialist front—and they say this, we asked it as a rhetorical question: Would the “anti-imperialist united front” include the president of Mexico? And they said: Why, yes, using a hypothetical—if in the future Mexico were attacked by the U.S., wouldn't you be for a military bloc with AMLO [Mexico's president Andrés Manuel López Obrador]?

We would defend Mexico militarily against U.S. imperialism—of course we would. But what's happening right now is that he [AMLO] is serving as the border guard for Yankee imperialism. And they rush to his *political* defense. And one of their main arguments, I found it quite comical. They said, well, he had half a million people at this rally. When I moved to Mexico in the spring of 1988, the president of Mexico, Miguel de la Madrid from the government party, the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party], had 1.3 million people at his May Day rally. He must have been an “anti-imperialist”—let's make an “anti-imperialist united front” with him, now.

How about, is there anywhere in the world where the ICL calls for an anti-imperialist united front now? It would be nice if comrade Perrault would answer that, but I can give you at least part of an answer. They say that it was

necessary to form an anti-imperialist united front with the government of Greece in 2015. They say that voting for the maneuver by SYRIZA, the bourgeois populist-nationalist government party of Greece, was necessary. We said no, this is a maneuver, we're not going to participate in tricking the workers. They [SYRIZA] are going to capitulate immediately to the bankers and this is preparation for that. They [the ICL] said no, you've got to vote for it. Now retroactively they say, yeah and guess what: that was an anti-imperialist united front. And it was necessary to make “a common front”—with the government. *With the government*. So, more will be coming on that.

But what if they say, “Wait a minute,” some not yet up-to-speed SLer or ICLer might get up and say, “No, we're talking about the *original* discussion at the Fourth Congress [of the Comintern, 1922]. We're not talking about *now*.” Really? Trotsky said the real historical process invests terms with meaning, historically.

But let's look back at it. This was the Fourth Congress, comrade Perrault. Safarov, leader of Comintern work among the peoples of the East, said in the discussion on the Theses on the Eastern Question (you can find it in John Riddell's very valuable collection): he said, since “the colonial and national revolution is a bourgeois-democratic revolution,” a “bourgeois-democratic government in the backward countries provides support and great reassurance for our proletarian movement.” Now is that Stalin? Is that Stalinism? No, the whole struggle in

real life in the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27, in which the Stalinists used the formula of the anti-imperialist united front, yielded a bloody result through which, indeed, despite your [the present-day ICL's] denials, Leon Trotsky extended the theory of permanent revolution internationally.

This is why they [the ICL today] are doing all this stuff about the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.” All the theoretical revisionism and rewriting of the history of the Russian Revolution that they're doing: it's got a political purpose. Program does generate theory, you know. What you want guides what you do.

So how about the representative for Iran at the Fourth Congress discussion of those theses? He said—his name was Nikbin: “The Party,” in Iran, “is trying to create a general anti-imperialist alliance.... It has made an extensive proposal for a democratic”—that beloved word, *democratic*, the ICL is very much in love with that word *democracy, democratic*. And yes, we fight for democratic rights and in the countries of belated capitalist development, the bourgeois-democratic tasks can only be carried through by the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by and resting on the peasants. But he [Nikbin] says the party has a “proposal for a democratic bloc that is to include representatives of all the national and democratic groups.... [T]he bourgeois parties themselves are seeking a bloc with us,” said the representative for Iran.

But what about China? The representative of the Chinese CP—this is at

the Fourth Congress, and I'll finish up with this. "Starting from the principle that an anti-imperialist front should be established to drive imperialism out of China," said the representative of the Chinese Communist Party at the Fourth Comintern Congress discussion on the Theses that they [the ICL] uphold, "our party decided to achieve a united front with the national-revolutionary Guomindang party. This united front took the form that we joined this party." And we know, don't we, where that led.

So let's follow them! I don't think so. Thank you.

REBUTTAL BY G. PERRAULT

I'll start by saying that comrade Negrete certainly didn't make my job easy. I'll try to answer many of the questions, and I'll try also to clarify the confusion because there's a lot of themes and none of it makes sense. I personally feel much more confused after hearing this report about what the IG thinks about the world.

So, let's start with the question that was hammered on. Why follow us? Well, I'll answer. It's because we're using a dialectical and Marxist analysis to chart a path forward. I'll start with a small example.

I made a prediction at the beginning of my report—that was the quote from Trotsky. That the "essence of sectarianism consists in measuring historical processes at the scale of one's own group." And this is exactly what we got from Negrete today. It seems like the whole world situation revolves around the disputes between the ICL and the LFI. And certainly, you know, we've admitted all these problems with our past and how we've done things.

But something that's forgotten in Negrete's presentation is that there was a crisis in the whole left. How did anybody else do in building bridges in this period? Open your eyes! You'll see that the left is in an absolutely pathetic state. Why? There is not a single answer to this question. It's all about these narrow little disputes that most people in the world have no idea about. And honestly, they're not of interest for most people in the world. These little narrow disputes of 30 years ago.

The question of building a bridge. It's true, you know. We said, oh, our bridges have broken and now what we

did is we re-evaluated our engineering and now have a new plan on how to make a bridge. The problem is the whole rest of the left has failed to build a bridge, and they're still trying to do the same thing. The LFI has been outside our organization for almost 30 years. Negrete was able to point to a number of actions that the LFI has done, which are certainly commendable. But in terms of providing revolutionary leadership on the key questions of the epoch, the LFI has utterly failed, and utterly fails today too.

Now, I think comrade Negrete forgot—although he named it—he forgot the theme of this debate, the fight for the Fourth International today. How are we going to move this fight forward? This is the question of today's debate. And you had no answer for this from Negrete. Let's start with the three points I outlined: reality, the reasons for defeats and the road for victory.

Think about Negrete's presentation. How did he answer these three questions? First of all, reality. "Oh, so there was a memorandum, and there were a few bad formulations. We did some wrong predictions, but that's okay. You know, that doesn't really matter so much."

But I'm sorry. To not understand that U.S. imperialism has been hegemonic for the last 30 years—actually, well before the last 30 years—is not a little analytical mistake. If you don't understand that, you understand nothing about the world. And, you know, Negrete gave a number of examples of times that people used the world situation to justify being opportunist. Yeah, that's certainly true.

But if you read Trotsky, it's always so clear in all his polemics against Stalinism that his entire critique is rooted in a correct materialist understanding of the world situation. That's not a secondary point. That's absolutely fundamental. And it wasn't just the 1992 conference document. Look at the LFI's website today. Still, to this day, the LFI denies that the post-Soviet world order is defined by the hegemony of the United States.

This means it understands nothing. And now, right now, it's so obvious that it's breaking down, as Negrete himself said. But if you see it breaking down without understanding how you got there, then you're totally blind. And then you think, "Oh, the Third

World War is coming now." Without understanding the actual laws behind it, the contradictions, how it's evolving in a contradictory and dialectical way.

Now, the reasons for defeats. Have you heard a single explanation from Negrete of why the working class has suffered defeats for the last 30 years? Oh, we heard plenty about why the ICL was bad, that's for sure. But why has the working class been defeated for the last 30 years? My presentation provided an explanation for this. It was rooted in the hegemony of the United States and the triumph of liberalism. If you look at the ideology in the workers movement for the last 30 years, everywhere in the world, it has been defined by the dominance of liberalism—the trade unions, BLM, all the movements.

Now, the reasons for defeat. Okay, Negrete pointed out that we didn't write leaflets and that they wrote a lot of leaflets during BLM. True, correct. A lot of other groups wrote leaflets. But Negrete did not answer the question: Why was BLM defeated? And what are the lessons to be drawn for today? It's not just a question of writing leaflets. All the left wrote leaflets. And the movement ended in a disaster. That's obvious. Why? And what to do now about it? There's no answer to this. This is a fundamental question.

How to advance black liberation? How to defeat imperialism in Ukraine? Negrete didn't actually answer this question. How do you actually defeat it? "We have the right position because of A, B plus C." Okay, but if you look at the concretes: How do you advance the class struggle in Ukraine right now? The Ukraine army is being massacred. There's discontent that's brewing. There is talk of a possible coup in Ukraine. There will very likely be a revolt in the Ukraine army. The question: Which direction will it go? Will it be under the communist banner or will it be under the reactionary banner of fascism? You'll never win the Ukrainian workers to welcome the Russian troops in taking over Kharkiv and Kiev. You'll never win them to that. If you want a revolution in Ukraine, you must work toward the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers. That is the only road.

A plus B—where does that logic get the LFI? They compare Russia's position in the Ukraine war to Iraq [being invaded by the U.S.]. It's not the same



Spartakist photos

October 2023: Berlin cops harass German Spartacist demonstration in defense of Palestinians in Gaza and Germany. The left, including LFI, rejected call (center) for urgently needed united-front action.

thing. A U.S. proxy war is also not the same thing as a direct war. And it's kind of obvious. We would know if there was a war between U.S. imperialism and Russia. That's not the same thing as what is happening now. To compare the Russian situation to the situation of China being invaded by Japan is absurd.

Now, the road to victory. How do we actually advance Palestinian liberation? No answer on this. How do we defend China today? No answer on this. On Palestine, Negrete asked everybody to stand up that had participated in actions to defend against the witchhunt.

In Germany, where the offensive has been the strongest, the LFI has refused to do a united front with us. Now, it's not about "did you come to our demo?" That's not the point. The point is that there is an urgent need in Germany for the left and workers movement that stand in support of Palestine to unite against social democracy and against the offensive.

So everybody, including the LFI, can go to the demos for Palestine, say they stand in solidarity, but when it comes to trying to build a united front against this offensive, they refuse. And okay, maybe they don't want to come to our thing or follow our call, but at the last forum I challenged Negrete: Okay, put forward your own call for a united front. This question is crucial.

REBUTTAL BY ABRAM NEGRETE

On liberalism, I would like to ask comrade Perrault to please define what the ICL means by the word. Please, because it's used many, many times in

their analysis. They use the term *liberalism* 51 times in *Spartacist* [No. 68]. They use *liberal* 87 times. A very large part of their program consists, apparently, of saying "liberal," of saying the word "liberalism" many times, and telling people to break from it. Liberalism has a very strong power, almost mystical magical power to make people do stuff, according to them. It's liberal idealism.

The picture that they present of the world in the post-Soviet period is remarkably similar to that of the "death of communism" triumphalists. Supposedly, apparently, after the destruction of the Soviet Union there was considerable peace, prosperity and the growth of productive forces. Hmm, OK.

Now there's a bunch of stuff to say about this, but I would like to talk a bit about what they're doing now—because they say "we're tired of talking about the past and the self-referential stuff," which is pretty interesting for an organization whose Program for the Fourth International, quote unquote, consists overwhelmingly of denouncing itself. *Vote for us, we were deformed since birth!* Jim Robertson, revisionist shmuck, according to them; it actually pisses me off.

But what about what they're doing now? What about Palestine? Compare their leaflet to ours—compare "Only Death and Defeat with Hamas: A Revolutionary Road"—quote unquote—"for Palestine Liberation": that's the headline. It genuflects to the bourgeoisie and what it demands. Right at the beginning and repeatedly, just like after 9/11. And what ours has to say: "Defend the Palestinians Against U.S./Israel Genocidal War on Gaza! Drive the Zionists Out of the West Bank and Gaza! For International Workers Action

Against the Attack on Gaza!" So please tell me how, here in the United States or in Europe or in most places, the key task is to dispel illusions in—Hamas?

Now what about Palestine, where, as the pompous SLer (who's in the room here) used to say all the time, "the rubber hits the road." They've got a very interesting statement from [the ICL's] British paper, *Workers Hammer*. It says: "Trade unions must take concrete action to stop arms shipments to Israel"—yeah. That was on October 20, 2023. The next day, *Workers Vanguard* has a supplement on the strike of the auto workers. I remember—some of you do too, I'm sure—that in 1973, 2,000 Arab American auto workers walked out in a protest against Zionism. Dearborn, Michigan is a largely Arab American city—auto. What [does the WV supplement] say?

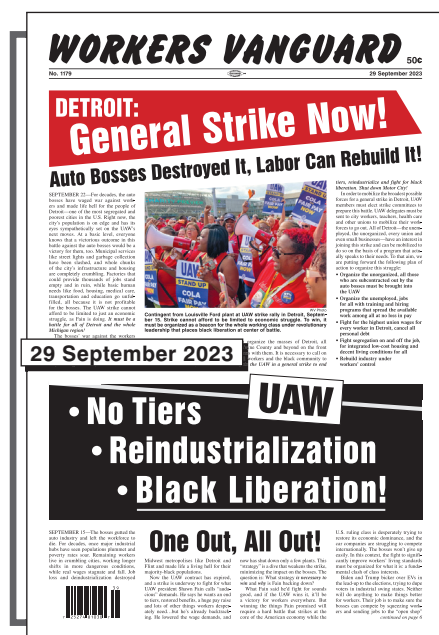
It says:

"Lots of workers are watching the horrors in Gaza and wondering what they can do. The main thing that workers can do to fight for Palestinian liberation is to *win this strike!*"

—"UAW: Let's Win This for Real!" (21 October 2023), emphasis in original

Nothing about stopping arms shipments, nothing about fighting to stop arms shipments, nothing about convincing others to fight to stop arms shipments, nothing about calling for it—but win your strike, don't be distracted by the genocide in Gaza, pursue your strike. Yes, they should win their strike, but to separate this in this way, and to tell the workers to do nothing, nothing, *nothing*—this is worse than economism.

And lastly, what they're doing now. A "revolutionary" program for black liberation, unlike BLM, which had *liberal* demands. True, and we exposed

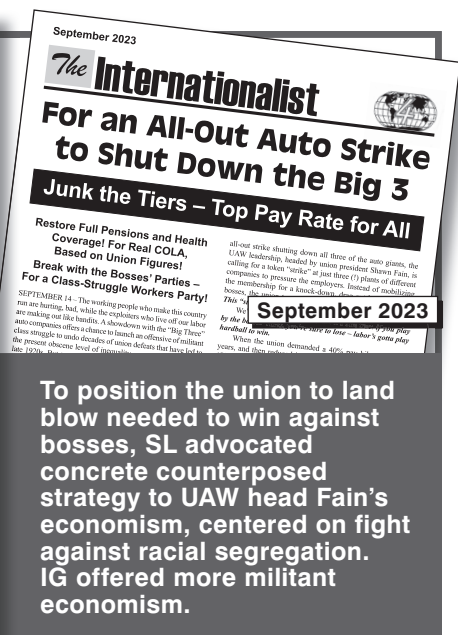


those demands systematically in our press, in our leaflets, in our speeches, in our signs, on the streets, in the meetings, in the unions. We did not collapse ignominiously, which is a capitulation to your own bourgeoisie. I don't give a damn about how messed up you were in your organization, you couldn't bring yourselves to put out one leaflet? ***Nobody*** should follow you. Your credit is zero.

But what do they call for in their campaign? “What’s necessary is a fight that will unite the broadest possible forces”—popular-front language. Take motions for opening the police archives, bring them “to your political officials who claim to represent you. We need to mobilize to bring pressure down on all the liberal and progressive politicians who claim to stand for workers and for black rights.... Opening the police archives is doable”—it’s a “*doable*” demand—“and, in fact, can be done by any politician in office that is really on the side of black people.”

Want some liberalism? It's right here. And what would happen if those archives were opened? Who's going to choose the "hundred most heinous cases"? The cops? And you believe what's in the cops' archives? Don't you know anything about what cops put in archives?

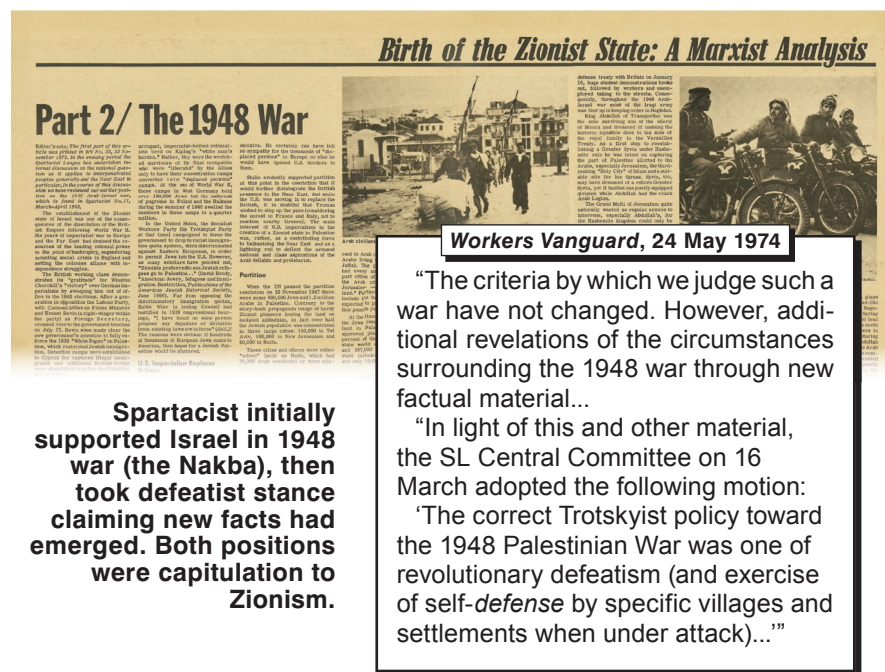
That's what you're doing today. You're trying to spread liberal illusions. And you say that it's "exposing them." I heard that from the SWP, pretty much every day of the year. And all the other opportunists.



SELECT FLOOR INTERVENTIONS

ICL speaker

I am with the Spartacist League. So, the Internationalist Group and the LFI have been criticizing our statement on the Gaza war—which in the beginning, if you read it, very clearly puts forward a program for how to *destroy* the Zionist state and *defeat* imperialism—as a capitulation to Zionism and a “genuflection” to imperialism. Why do



While the SL did in 1974 change its line on that war, it was not on the basis of rejecting this line as an utterly reactionary position, but on the basis of supposedly new facts. So, the SL's historic position is undeniably a capitulation to Zionism. The SL—and you guys uphold this—never approached these wars as national wars where we had a side with the Palestinian Arabs.

Do you really think this line doesn't need to be looked at critically? Are you really defending this legacy? That's a big contradiction for communists who say they are fighting for the national liberation of the Palestinians, which obviously you cannot do if you are betraying that struggle and capitulating to Zionism. So, yes, we are breaking with that, and it is necessary to do so, given the task of today, which is to raise the Leninist-Trotskyist banner in Palestine and Israel. That's why we are revisiting and correcting this position.

LFI speaker

OK. Hello, everyone. I'm a member of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, the youth group of the Internationalist Group. It was founded in 2017, and it is a training ground for young revolutionaries. And it seeks to win young people from around the U.S., and around the world, to the program of Trotskyism. That is, to carry through to victory the genuine communist program of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. All of it. Not just bits and pieces. Not just the quotes that we like. Not revised or redacted versions that make it more acceptable to "our" national bourgeoisie. But all of it.

Since 2017, we have recruited many young people to this program. I joined in 2018 for many reasons. But at first because of the internationalist and revolutionary Marxist position of independence for Puerto Rico, the oldest colony. And doing so—upholding that position—irrespective of what imperialist pressure and fear tactics have done to the Puerto Rican population. I am glad you finally re-adopted that position, after how many years?

In 2020 and 2021, we grew during our and the Internationalist Group's intervention in some of the largest mass protests against racist police murder. We didn't just write about it. We were there. You can see the photos outside. We defied the lockdowns, as did millions of other people. We were not paralyzed. We were ready.



Universal Images Group

Palestinian refugees driven from Galilee during Nakba. LFI upholds historic position of Spartacist tendency, refusing to side with Palestinians in 1948. Fight for Palestinian liberation must be at core of communist strategy for region.

On the question of how can we break something if we don't put pressure on it. Good question. Well, how can you do that, or let alone be the revolutionary leadership of the working class, through abstention or through absence? You can't.

Most recently, we organized a protest outside Hunter College against the McCarthyite witchhunts currently being waged against defenders of the Palestinians and those willing to mobilize against this U.S./Israel war. Sectarian us invited the SL to protest and to speak. And what did you do? Echoed imperialist propaganda. Again. And you accused the left of tailing Hamas. But you're used to echoing imperialist talking points—you do that with China. So, you've seen the present-day ICL, multiple-time betrayers.

If you want to see what a real revolutionary organization looks like, come by our table. And lastly, you say that we will try to say that the ICL has made nothing but mistakes. You do that all on your own. Many times. And you're right. You have, and not just with formulations, saying "a" instead of "an," but on key questions, decisive questions, that will make or break a socialist revolution, here or anywhere. And our leaflets are important. What do those leaflets say? That's it. Thank you.

ICL speaker

I'm from the SL. The speaker from the LFI challenged our assertion that liberalism became the predominant ideology in the post-Soviet period. Yes, it did, and there is a simple reason.

Karl Marx said, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas." The U.S. imperialists won the Cold War and proclaimed the triumph of liberal bourgeois democracy. Now, if you don't recognize the primacy of liberalism in this period you end up tailing it as the LFI does today. You do it through opportunism. Examples are your tailing of the Neely protests, your solidarizing with the liberal pro-Palestinian solidarity milieu, your support to the bourgeoisie's lockdowns and your tailing of BLM. You also do it through sectarian means and a very good example is your refusal to participate in our police archives campaign. Far from it being us pushing liberalism, what you are doing is protecting the liberals. Because we are making a demand that these politicians come out against the cops with whom they overwhelmingly work. And you don't want to put them to the test. You're protecting those people.

Now, finally, I want to say something about your disgraceful disfigurement of the history of the RT [Revolutionary Tendency] and the founding of the Spartacist League. You talked about our struggle against the SWP on Cuba. What was it about? What the SWP was doing was becoming a cheerleader for Castro and Cuban Stalinism. That is exactly what you people are doing in China with your completely uncritical support to the policies of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy. And on the black question, what the RT fought for was an independent, communist leadership for black liberation, not to be cheerleaders

WORKERS VANGUARD Supplement
15 September 2023

UAW

- No Tiers
- Reindustrialization
- Black Liberation!

One Out, All Out!

WORKERS VANGUARD Supplement
21 October 2023

UAW: Let's Win This Already!

The UAW strike is going into week six. Workers are hungry and struggling to survive on strike pay. Fain's strategy isn't working—it's just dragging this out. We need to take decisive action to wrap this up—and win! Workers want to fight, and not just to win. Blue Cross.

Spread the Strike!
If you work in a plant that is not struck, organize with your co-workers to shut it down. Strike committees must send groups of workers to other plants and other worksites to get on picket lines and get those workers to join the strike.

WORKERS VANGUARD Supplement
28 October 2023

25% Won't Turn the Tide!

A 25 percent raise, promises of CBA's and other terms offered from the Big 3 aren't cutting it. They won't turn the tide for the struggling class and workers in this country or even in Detroit. On October 28 Fain said "If we stand together if we have faith, we will win. We have a good contract. We have a record contract. But a contract that turns the tide." We all know this is a fight for significant gains, but what we offer is going to be a record contract. The Big 3 are not going to give us a record contract. They are not going to give us a record contract. They are not going to give us a record contract.

WORKERS VANGUARD Supplement
22 September 2023

DETROIT

GENERAL STRIKE NOW!

Auto Bosses Destroyed It, Labor Can Rebuild It!

Matthew Hatcher/AFP

September 2023: UAW strikers on picket lines in Wayne, Michigan. From outset, SL fought to shape union struggle, extend fight to black masses, expose union tops, who confined strike to what was acceptable to bosses.

for liberal black movements or the civil rights movement. That is exactly the opposite of what you do when you tail BLM.

LFI speaker

I'm with the IG. In your March [2023] article "For Black Trotskyism," you write that the SL rejected the need to fight for leadership of the struggle for black liberation, that you refused to fight for the Trotskyist program for revolutionary integrationism, and that this amounted to a betrayal. Your paper is littered with all sorts of betrayals, okay, that you've committed. Some concocted for internal purposes, but this betrayal is true. The SL collapsed and put forward absolutely no program responding to the racist police murder of George Floyd. This amounted to a capitulation, okay, to the bourgeoisie. Because betrayals are not mistakes. It's class treason. Understand? No amount of public self-flagellation in your paper will exonerate you from your political

bankruptcy on the black question in the United States.

We, the IG, have consistently fought for black liberation through socialist revolution. We say that only revolution can bring justice because there is no justice in capitalist America. You sneer at this slogan, writing that it is as true as it is sterile. But you kept your hands clean by, in your own words, capitulating to the lockdowns and racist curfews imposed by the Democrats while we marched and mobilized labor against racist police and fascist terror.

Now you seek to create fanciful illusions in the bourgeoisie to then expose those very illusions, like calling to "unite the broadest possible forces"... "to bring pressure down on all the liberal and progressive politicians who claim to stand for workers and for black rights" and open all the police archives. Why? Because "opening the police archives is doable and in fact can be done by any politician in office who is really on the side of black people." Do

you really think that opening the police archives will bring some kind of justice? We're for the right of armed black self-defense, for the militant organized power of the working class and for the formation of a revolutionary working-class party to fight for the liberation of the oppressed through socialist revolution. You are for a liberal pressure campaign. That's what fake leftists do.

You were silent as a grave in 2020, and now you want to create your own fake movement, a popular front, with capitalist politicians to open the police archives. Your actual betrayals keep multiplying day by day. And you want to trivialize that. To you, "everyone betrays." Don't insult our intelligence as if we can't read or trust what we see with our own eyes. The SL and IG are nothing alike, and people see that immediately.

ICL speaker

I'm from the Spartacist League. I want to touch on comrade Negrete accusing our interventions in the UAW strike of being economist. Our whole intervention, from the very beginning—when we put forth the program of no tiers, reindustrialization and black liberation for the UAW strike—was to actually fight against the economism of Shawn Fain, who was putting forward the notion that you could turn the tide for the working class and advance the interests of the working class by economic struggle alone. Well, no. Fighting for black liberation means you have to go right up against the interests of the capitalists. You have to show that the workers struggle and the black struggle need to be fused together in order to actually advance the struggle and go against capitalist interests.

So, when we say in that leaflet that you waved around that the best thing UAW workers can do right now for Palestinian liberation is to win this strike, what we are saying is that you need to deal a blow against imperialism, against capitalist interests. That is the best thing they can do for the Palestinians right now. I don't think you can conceive of that because the only way you can conceive of this class battle is on the terms of the bureaucracy, what Shawn Fain was putting forward. The whole thing we were putting forward was to smash his narrow economism, that the strike needs to be

waged like an actual battle of class interests. That is what we meant in that statement.

Another thing I want to touch on is what the comrade over there said about our police archives campaign. Because I think we need to go back to what the theme of this debate is, whether it be the UAW or the police archives: how do you guide the day-to-day struggles of the working class? How do you actually drive a wedge between the leadership, the dominant ideology and the base? Because the whole purpose of our campaign is to expose to the black masses and to the working class that these liberal politicians and everyone else are not on their side. Yes, we want the police archives to be open. Are these liberal politicians going to do it? No! We know that. And we are trying to expose to the black masses and the working class that these people are their enemy.

I'd like to raise the question again: What do you guys put forward, offer, for the UAW strike, for the black struggle? Because, really, it just seems to be a lot of abstract formulas. But how do you actually guide the struggle today? How do you actually put a wedge between the masses and the leadership? Because right now, you're really just offering socialist revolution. Okay, yes, that's obviously how you emancipate people. But what should people be doing today?

LFI supported speaker

Hi, I'm a supporter of Class Struggle Workers-Portland. And I want to talk about fighting for a class-struggle program and what that looks like in practice now, because that's what we're doing in Portland.

First, I just want to say that, as we speak, the Port of Oakland has been shut down by 3,000 pickets in protest against the war on Gaza. All cargo has been stopped, and the workers are preparing for a possible showdown later today. And I just want to take a minute to salute those pickets, because that's what we mean when we talk about class struggle, by the way.

You might have seen the poster outside featuring a resolution that was proposed by members of the Class Struggle Workers-Portland. And it passed both in the Ironworkers Local 29 and Painters Local 10 in Portland. It calls for labor to refuse to handle



Jason Redmond/AFP

IAM 751 Mobilize! committee turned indoor rally organized by union bureaucrats into mass picket line, showing way forward for union struggle, Seattle, October 15. SL intervened to guide fighting Machinists to escalate the strike and put union on top.



war goods in solidarity with the Palestinian trade unions' call for labor to stop shipments of arms to the U.S.-Israel war on Gaza. That's what we mean when we talk about class struggle. We're talking about getting workers actively involved where their power lies in their workplaces, organizing together to stop the shipment of war goods. That's what we're doing.

But I want to dial back to where all of this stuff came from, because these resolutions didn't just come out of nowhere. To understand where they actually came from, it's important to look back to August of 2016, when the Painters union in Portland, Local 10, at the behest of Class Struggle Workers supporters, passed a resolution to break with the Democrats and all parties of the bosses.

And this is important because labor's allegiance to the Democrats in the U.S. is a major impediment to class struggle here, right? Like the leadership's actual ties to the Democratic Party are what

often forces the unions to capitulate to the demands of the Democratic Party, a ruling-class party.

After that resolution, there were several other actions that took place in Portland. So, on June 4th of 2017, when the Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys staged a provocation in Portland, they were met with hundreds of workers from at least 14 area unions, who effectively stopped them from marching. They boxed them in.

In 2020, when mass protests erupted following the murder of George Floyd, Class Struggle Workers-Portland organized several contingents of workers to intervene in the class struggle. Not to tail it, but to actually go out into the streets and have those political arguments inside of our union halls and in the streets. Instead of staying on the sidelines and calling the protesters liberals like the ICL would have us do.

As Democratic mayor "Teargas Ted" Wheeler gassed protesters every single day, federal, state, county and local

police snatched protesters from the streets. Class Struggle Workers-Portland and the IG stood on the side of class struggle against racist police murder and in solidarity with the protesters being beaten.

ICL speaker

Hello. Comrade Negrete in his speech said: Imagine we're a group of workers, and we want a leadership and we're pretty radical. And he made his case in terms of we'll judge between the ICL and the LFI. And he said the ICL cannot be trusted because look at all the bad things they did in the 1990s and the 2000s. They have written this or that.

Well, comrade Negrete, two things. First of all, I think workers quite like that the ICL is actually honest about its past. It looks at its mistakes head on, doesn't polish them and is straightforward about what we missed. And, you know what? The problems and the mistakes of the ICL are also the problems and mistakes of the entire left. Why is the left so small? So tiny? So sclerotic? Explain that to me. That's the problem of this epoch and we actually tried to respond to it. Workers might think these people have an explanation to something. But the LFI just ignores the problems and will only talk about the tertiary events that happened between our two tiny organizations.

Second, Negrete has forgotten that what matters for radical workers who are engaged in a struggle is what to do. What to do today. How to move the struggle forward. And I think the presentations were quite different on that matter. On the one side, you had a regurgitation about all sorts of tertiary problems that are completely divorced from the last 30 years and the great questions of the revolutionary movement today. And on the other, you had a presentation that actually shows on Palestine, on the black liberation struggle, on Ukraine what the key tasks are for revolutionaries to move forward today.

And so, a lot of speakers are coming up from the LFI, saying: "BLM, oh yeah, we were there, we put out leaflets." One of your speakers said, maybe you should check out what the leaflets say. Yeah. They say what the ILWU did was great. And another speaker just got up saying that there is an action [of the ILWU] going on right now. Who leads ILWU Local 10? A bunch of pro-Democratic Party social

democrats who need to be overthrown. And your leaflet says it's great what they're doing. Yeah, they're reformist, but it's great. That's not fighting for revolutionary leadership.

So here's the thing, comrades in the LFI. This debate is called "The Fight for the Fourth International Today." And we provided a response. You looked at the past. We have a program for the present and the future. And we use our mistakes of the past—we're very honest about them—to push that forward. Because—and in response to Platypus—that's what orthodox Marxism is today.

LFI speaker

(The following is based on a translation by the LFI delivered initially in Portuguese.)

I would like to talk a little about a historic struggle here in Brazil and what the ICL did in 1996 and subsequently. A campaign to expel the municipal *guardas* from the SFPMVR (the Volta Redonda municipal workers union) was connected to the struggle against the PT (Workers Party) and racial oppression. For example, we brought the campaign to mobilize workers power to free Mumia Abu-Jamal to Brazil.

The struggle to remove the police was carried out on the basis of our experience in the huge strikes of the metal workers—many of them under the military dictatorship. The one in 1988 we, the workers, won despite the repression unleashed by the army, which culminated in its murdering three workers. We were the first, and up to now the only ones, to have put into practice the Trotskyist slogan: police of all kinds are not part of the working class and must be expelled from the unions. Through systemic mobilization of the workers, we carried out this campaign, which is now part of the history of the fight for the Fourth International.

What is ironic is that the ICL, which had encouraged us at first, wound up demanding that the comrades stop the campaign, abandon the union and, furthermore, leave the city of Volta Redonda. Since obviously we did not accept this shameful position, the ICL broke fraternal relations with us exactly one day before the union assembly we had mobilized for the workers to vote to carry out the expulsion of the police. That assembly was repressed. But despite this and the ICL's abandonment

of the struggle, we continued the campaign and the police were expelled by the workers' vote.

The ICL tried to cover up its betrayal, launching one assorted slander after another, many of them taken from the pro-police, anti-communist grouping in Volta Redonda that tried to crush the campaign. The ICL even went so far as to try to stop unions in Brazil and other countries from defending us. Using the experience we have gained—the struggle to expel the police, the struggle against imperialist wars, the struggle against racism and racial oppression and women's oppression and all the crimes of the Brazilian bourgeoisie—we created the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (Fourth Internationalist League of Brazil), one of the founding sections of the LFI. This is part of the fight that we, together with the other sections in the LFI, are carrying out to reforge Trotsky's world party of socialist revolution.

ICL speaker

All right. This is how we demonstrated revolutionary leadership. It was with our Neely/Penny statement, which some of your members called racist. But what happens when you call our statement racist and give no answer to the issue of crime or to working-class self-defense? You fuel the destructive racial polarizations in society.

What was happening in this city at that moment? The anti-racist liberals were dividing the class along racial lines by saying Neely's death was a racist attack. They told the working class that if they express any concern on crime or even defend themselves from an attack by a mentally ill person, they are either uncompassionate or racist. Ignoring the issue of crime will only push the working class, both black and white, into the arms of reaction.

You can see the beginnings of it now. It's why many of the workers, seeing no revolutionary alternative, voted for Eric Adams in the first place, because he campaigned on a platform of "law and order," especially in the subways.

Every day, the working masses are crushed by the bosses. Then they go home to dilapidated apartments if they haven't caught on fire or collapsed yet. And in between, they have to take public transit, where they have to fight off attackers who either want to rob them or push them on the tracks. And



Lichtenstein/Getty

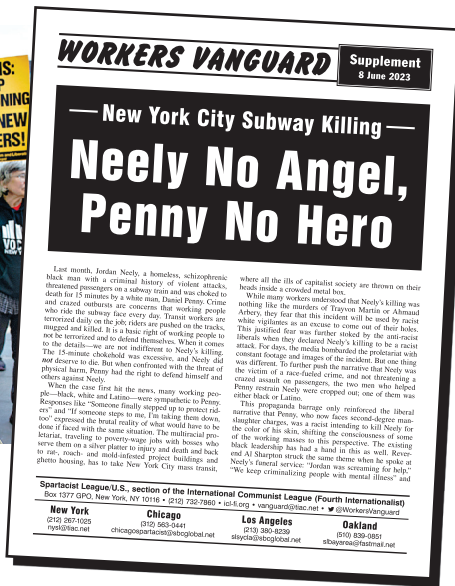
NYC, May 2023: Liberal protest of Neely's killing. LFI denounces our leaflet, which cuts through liberal-fueled racial polarization.

in between, they have to worry if the train car will derail. Seriously, have you not taken the train to see what goes on down there? Have you not spoken to the working masses who take the trains and who are forced to face the rot created by the capitalists?

Because, let me tell you, working-class sentiment was: finally, someone got involved. Especially transit workers who deal with these hazards every day. But, no, that didn't go along with the anti-racist liberal narrative. So, they made it seem as if Neely was performing; Penny went up behind him and killed him because of the color of his skin. When that's not the case at all. Ask anyone who was on the train that day.

And here's the thing, though. Neely did not deserve to die. But Penny had the right to self-defense and to defend the people on the train. And by placing the blame on them, you alibi those who are actually responsible for the Neelys and Pennys out there. That's the bourgeoisie. This is how the issue of crime was taken up. On the one hand, you have the liberals, who tell the workers to ignore crime, turn the other cheek, eat the abuse. And then you have the right-wingers, who acknowledge crime, but their answer is vigilantism. Both of which only fuel racial polarizations.

It was the task of communists to cut through this racial division, expose how both these programs have no answer for the working class, both black and white. We needed to expose the right, but also to show that it wasn't liberal compassion Neely needed. He needed housing, employment, healthcare. None of which you could get from the capitalist system



because it's in repeated economic and social decay. And these aren't gains you can win with the program of the anti-racist liberals because they only try to curb the worst excesses of capitalism while trying to beg the bosses to be nice to the people who they oppress.

And I want to add that the scaffolding for our statement was the Bernard Goetz articles written by Jan Norden. Weird that you don't even make a peep on that. Is it because you've fallen into the trap of liberal hysteria that has gripped this city? Or because you want to tail and not alienate the liberals?

SUMMARY BY ABRAM NEGRETE

First of all, I wanted to just mention that among the things that the ICL says that it's going to investigate, and that we are waiting to hear the results of, are the [1996] trials; the trial of comrade Socorro, and the trial that was going to be held of comrades Jan and Marjorie.

I want to send greetings to comrade Socorro of the Internationalist Group, a founder of our organization, and to protest here yet again against the filthy trial which you staged against her. Some of you are here in this room. We want to know *what* was unprincipled about that trial. And if you say "everything," that's true, but you don't get away with just that. And if it's maybe ancient history to you, and not so important, perhaps that's because you were on the dishing out end and not the receiving end.

Similarly, when comrade Vincent [an

ICL leader who spoke during the discussion period] says that the ICL at least admits its mistakes. I call this the Boy Scout defense: *Hey, everybody makes mistakes, but we admit it.* You get merit badges for it. No. What I will say about that is, you've had a lot of practice, haven't you? In terms of your so-called "mistakes." But there's one little problem. According to us, and according to you, they were not mistakes, they were betrayals. They were betrayals. Have you ever been on the receiving end of a betrayal—I mean, a political, social one in the class struggle. The comrade from Brazil just talked about what that was about. That was a real struggle. It was a struggle to bring the program of Trotskyism into practice.

Now, unbelievably, we heard here today that the so-called "real crime" was not that sort of thing, but failing to understand the documents—the power of the documents from 1992 and so on and so forth. This is the memorandum theory of history yet again. Well, the very powerful documents magically made *you* do one thing—and *us* do the other. You say, well they both voted for the documents and they're both the same, the [ICL] and the IG/LFI are both the same. The IG fought and the LQB fought to *throw the police out of the union—and you fought to stop it.* You told them to stop. Why? "The memo made us do it." Funny that this powerful memo made us do the opposite.

How about 9/11? ["How about it?"] yells an ICL member from the audience.] We called to defeat U.S. imperialism. We marched in the streets with that slogan. We called for workers strikes against the war. Was that an abstract slogan? According to you it had no "resonance." We took it onto the docks. We took it onto the docks as the Iraq War was ramping up. This is not an abstract, hidebound, theoretical orthodoxy. This is called the class struggle—and you said that our call for hot-cargoing was wrong. Yes, you did, look it up. And we've documented it. You want to talk about the bureaucracy? That was the line of Jim Spinoso, [who was] the head of the ILWU: Don't stop the war matériel, it might cause problems for the union.

And we called for workers strikes against the war, and you and the rest of the opportunist left said that would never happen. But guess what? It did.

On May Day 2008, all 29 ports were shut down on the West Coast. And you sneered at it, and, talk about “deformed,” you deformed and you fabricated, same damn thing that you did about the Mumia shutdown [of the ports] in 1999—then you had to apologize and retract it, kind of, sort of.

But what about the one in Brazil that started it? The first workers action for Mumia’s freedom, the first labor shut-down for Mumia’s freedom. It’s not a page of paper, it’s a real action in the class struggle and it’s part of the program of revolutionary Marxism. That happened in Brazil. You have not written a single word about it since that time. Not one time, why do you think that is? Oh, because the “sectarians” carried it out. And the “anti-sectarians,” anti-sectarianly, don’t mention it. Because those are unmentionable, disposable people—disposable people on the receiving end, not of your “mistakes.” Everyone makes mistakes—trivial Boy Scout talking, I don’t mean the person, I mean the phrase. It was not a “mistake,” it was a betrayal.

And yes, when we called to defeat U.S. imperialism and we criticized you for dropping it, what did you say? A comrade referred to this. [Shows poster with quotations from *Workers Vanguard*, 26 October 2001.] No, we’re not going to let you forget it. You want to talk about “now”? *Now* is a product of history. *You* are a product of that history. You said that we were “playing the counterfeit card of anti-Americanism.” You said this in the weeks after 9/11, when “anti-Americanism” could land [someone] in prison. And there were roundups of immigrants all over the place and we went to the demonstrations to free them, which you did not, of course. (Well, you did go there, to denounce us, one time.)

And you said something else: “But the IG’s purpose is otherwise; it is playing to a different audience, one of ‘Third World’ nationalists for whom the ‘only good American is a dead American’.” That’s what you wrote about us. So you can say, well, we all make mistakes. This was not a “mistake,” and you’re doing the same kind of obeisance and genuflection to your own ruling class today, including over your leaflet on Palestine.

Why did this powerful memo make the two sides do opposite things? Because you ceased to be revolutionaries,

through a process of degeneration, which has now culminated in you openly saying that the founding program of the tendency you still pretend to have some continuity with, somehow, was what? The old-timers are supposed to chew this up and swallow it. “The historic position of Spartacism turned the world upside down.” Interesting. Look at your *Spartacist* 68. The hammer’s upside down and backwards—they get a lot of things upside down and backwards—in their new logo. “Shaped by the delusion that the historic leader of our tendency, Jim Robertson, had a correct approach,” blah blah, “therefore it upheld many positions counterposed to permanent revolution.” It’s a “perversion of permanent revolution,” they say.

The old-timers are supposed to eat it, swallow it and regurgitate it. *You have sold your birthright for a mess of pottage.* The revisions are far from finished. The reason for this stuff about the “anti-imperialist united front” and supporting the language laws in Quebec and Catalonia and embracing the Freedom Charter and the rest of it is to take what remains of this organization very, very far, qualitatively far—who knows how far?—but it will be enormously far from what it set out to do.

And I’m very glad, let me just say, that the [SL’s] grotesque Neely leaflet was attacked [in the discussion], and quite horrified by the [SL supporter’s] response.

Forward to a real Fourth International—not a collection of rotten opportunist gimmicks.

SUMMARY BY G. PERRAULT

Okay. So, I think I don’t need to explain once more that I actually provided a perspective for the fight for the Fourth International today, and there was absolutely nothing on this from the speakers of the LFI. So, I won’t insist too much on this point. I will actually respond to as many of the questions as I can. By the way, about the old-timers, you should talk to them, see what they think. I’ll tell you, they’re not kept hostage.

Let’s start with the crisis in the left. You cannot ignore this question. The entire left has been in crisis for the last, well, more than 30 years. But it’s been particularly acute in the last 30 years. You have to deal with this question

if you are serious about reforging the Fourth International. You have to try to provide an answer and explain: What is the reason for this crisis? You have no answer.

Liberalism, we were asked to define it. I’m not going to do a whole history of liberalism, which you can read somewhere else, but I’m going to try to pose it concretely because liberalism changes in different times and space. So, we did not invent the task to fight liberalism. Actually, most of Lenin’s career was spent fighting bourgeois liberalism in Russia, fighting the influence of the Cadets and against the Cadet opposition to tsarism. So, we’re not inventing the fight against liberalism. What we’re doing is we’re putting it in the concrete, the concrete of the epochs in the 1990s and today.

In the 1990s, as our comrade explained, liberalism was the ideology of U.S. imperialism. Its strength was a reflection of the strength of U.S. imperialism. It was pushed everywhere and that’s why you see the shift toward liberalism in the workers movement all around the world. Today, the character of liberalism is changing because U.S. imperialism is in decline. It’s no longer a confident liberalism, asserting and pushing. It’s a reactive, hysterical liberalism that cannot deal with any challenge, any criticism and that reacts frantically. Liberalism is the cover under which U.S. imperialism and its allies have committed all their crimes



Win McNamee/Reuters

1998: AFL-CIO chief John Sweeney (left), with President Clinton, pushed liberal policies like globalization, opening door to massive job losses.

around the world. This has fueled massive discontent. Yet the problem with the left is they're still trying to fight reaction today holding on to the coat-tails of this liberalism. It's not just some academic abstract question, it's rooted in the task. What is the task today? The task is to break the left from liberalism. That's the task.

Now let's get to some of the concrete questions. Palestine, what to do now? What is the obstacle to actually defending Palestine in the workers movement? It's the Democratic Party in the United States. We need to fight to break the influence of the Democratic Party on the movement. That means the DSAers who are now leading this movement. There's a gigantic popular front that goes from Joe Biden to the left-wing DSAers in Congress to the other DSAers who claim to be communists. You need to break this chain. If you cannot break this chain, you cannot defend Palestine because that's how the whole movement is being organized.

You want to talk about legacy. Answer this question about the legacy of the Spartacist League on the question of the Nakba. Our initial position, read it, it's a defense of the Nakba. That's a criminal position and then we covered it up by saying that it was a factual mistake. Answer this question!

Now the black question. BLM, what were the tasks? Why did the left betray? What was the task? The task was to break the black movement from liberalism and put it on a communist path. How to do that? Not just by saying "break with the Democrats" and not by just saying "we need socialist revolution." You need to exploit the contradictions of the movement, and that's exactly what we're trying to do with our "open the archives" campaign. And you know what again? It's not totally our invention. We are inspired by the call of the Bolsheviks to open the archives of tsarist secret diplomacy. You know how they achieved that? They did it. It was possible. You know how they did it. They made a revolution. That's how you do it. And you know what you're disparaging about our demand: "Oh, will that bring justice?" Actually, you know, there's hundreds of thousands of people whose families have been murdered by the cops who do want to know what happened and what's in these archives. It's not just some puff!

[Interjection from the LFI.] My turn!

Lenin Against Liberalism

In October 1912, when "Two Utopias" was written, Lenin's Bolsheviks had decisively split from the Mensheviks, whose fundamental politics were to rally the working class in support of the liberal bourgeoisie. Lenin fought for independent class struggle not only against the tsarist autocracy, which was backed by the pogromist Purishkeviches, but also against the liberals, whose deceptions were and are an obstacle to any such struggle.

The liberal bourgeoisie in general, and the liberal-bourgeois intelligentsia in particular, cannot but strive for liberty and legality, since without these the domination of the bourgeoisie is incomplete, is neither undivided nor guaranteed. But the bourgeoisie is *more* afraid of the movement of the masses than of reaction. Hence the striking, incredible *weakness* of the liberals in politics, their absolute impotence. Hence the endless series of equivocations, falsehoods, hypocrisies and cowardly evasions in the entire policy of the liberals, who *have to* play at democracy to win the support of the masses but at the same time are deeply anti-democratic, deeply hostile to the movement of the masses, to their initiative, their way of "storming heaven," as Marx once described one of the mass movements in Europe in the last century.

The utopia of liberalism is a utopia of impotence in the matter of the political emancipation of Russia, a utopia of the self-interested moneybags who want "peacefully" to share privileges with the Purishkeviches and pass off this noble desire as the theory of "peaceful" victory for Russian democracy. The liberal utopia means day-dreaming about how to beat the Purishkeviches without defeating them, how to break them without hurting them. Clearly, *this* utopia is harmful not only because it is a utopia, but also because it *corrupts* the democratic consciousness of the masses. If they believe in *this* utopia, the masses will never win freedom; they are not worthy of freedom; they fully deserve to be maltreated by the Purishkeviches....

The liberal utopia is a veil for the self-seeking desire of the new exploiters to share in the privileges of the old exploiters....

Clearly, the Marxists, who are hostile to *all and every* utopia, must uphold the independence of the class which can fight feudalism *with supreme devotion* precisely because it is not even one-hundredth part involved in property ownership which makes the bourgeoisie a half-hearted opponent, and often an ally, of the feudal lords.

—V.I. Lenin, "Two Utopias" (October 1912)

Mexico. Okay, you guys organized workers defense guards. All to your honor. But you know what? UNAM, it was a gigantic movement. How did revolutionaries intervene in this movement to break it from populism? Why wasn't there a revolutionary pole built out of this movement? Why? It's because all the so-called communists think that fighting against imperialism is a capitulation to the bourgeoisie. But the only way to defeat populism is to push forward the struggle against imperialism.

Portland. Your speaker said about the shutdown on the West Coast, "That's what we mean by class struggle." The ILWU supports Joe Biden. So, you can do one day of action, that's to let the steam out. Communist workers need to go to that. They need to support this. But they need to do this while at the same time denouncing the ILWU bureaucracy. And that's the element that's missing, and that's the centrism. The ILWU bureaucracy will never stop

arms shipments to Ukraine or to Palestine. There needs to be a fight against them, and that's exactly what you're not doing.

DSA, okay. How are you going to build a revolutionary party in the United States? It's by splitting social democracy, it's by splitting the DSA. You can go to them and be like, "Oh yes, you supported Vietnam, you supported all the crimes of U.S. imperialism," which is true, by the way, which is true, and you know what? The SPD, they supported all the crimes of German imperialism, and so on. But if you want a revolutionary party in Germany, you need to split the SPD. If you want a revolutionary party in the United States, you need to split social democracy, and you don't do that just by throwing rocks at people.

Actions, you want to talk about some of the actions we did. Look at our intervention in last year's strikes in Britain. Every step of the way, we told workers what needed to be done. We put

forward a campaign for picket lines, and it became a polarizing question in the left because the whole left refused to say, "Never cross a picket line."

UAW strike, same thing. Here again, we showed step by step. How dare you say it's economist. Our main slogan was to tie this strike to black liberation. And if you think that a devastating blow to GM and Ford would not have helped the Palestinians, you are so wrong. That would have totally undermined the position of the U.S. right now and made it much more difficult to commit their crimes in Palestine.

Brazil, you know what? What we did was despicable. I'm ashamed of it. But you know what? How are we going to advance the revolution in Brazil? We're gonna advance it by combining the struggle against imperialism and the fight against black oppression and showing how the popular front betrays this. And that's what you guys have not done. And that's what none of our discussions with Luta Metalúrgica ever touched on. [Interjection by the LFI.] It's my turn.

Robertson, a lot was said about Robertson. I want to defend him a little bit here. We do not throw away our whole legacy. Actually, what do we stand on? We stand on the proudest moment of the ICL. We stand on the Russian question, on the defense of the Soviet Union, on the defense of the DDR. Nobody said anything about this, but that's what we defend of Spartacism. So, no, we will not get rid of our paper. We will keep being proud to be Spartacists.



Spartakist

December 1989: Anti-fascist demo at Berlin's Treptow Park initiated by German Trotskyists. ICL fought against Stalinists, social democrats, imperialists for workers to take political power in East Germany.

Reading these documents by the LFI, actually, I got a fair amount of respect for the comrades who at the time refused to capitulate under this bureaucratic witch-hunt. Honestly. But just because you were the victims of a bureaucratic purge doesn't mean that you had the answers to the historic tasks of the working class in that epoch. So, you speak about the tasks and perspectives. But, you know what? If you don't have the correct tasks and perspectives, then you're not rooting your program in a Marxist materialist base. So, you're left just going around, floating around. And what happened? The truth is that the ICL and LFI were both circling around the pole of liber-

alism. Sometimes sectarian, sometimes opportunist. Both sides.

You can say: Oh yes, the SWP called us sectarian 30 years ago. But you know what? People are sectarian. Sectarianism is a problem in the left, just as opportunism is. And Trotsky and Lenin fought both tendencies.

So, I want to conclude by urging comrades to study these presentations. Study the content of the documents. And ask yourself, who actually has a perspective to go forward? Who can actually say what the task of revolutionary leadership is today?

And I think the answer to this question is very obvious. Thanks. ■

Strike Wave in Britain 2022-23

At every stage, Spartacist League provided a program to lead workers struggles to victory against sabotage by union misleaders.

WORKERS HAMMER

Queen croaks, Labourites crawl



To hell with half measures Workers must run the country!

No. 248, Autumn 2022

WORKERS HAMMER

Programme for NHS strikes:

- High wages
- Quality healthcare
- Women's liberation!

Tories on life support... union tops won't pull the plug



No. 249, Spring 2023

WORKERS HAMMER

Strike wave faces defeat: leaders to blame

How to rebuild union power

NEVER CROSS A PICKET LINE!

FIGHT FOR THESE DEMANDS:

- 1 - BUILD PICKET LINES-DON'T CROSS THEM!
- 2 - ENOUGH OF UNIONS SCABBING ON EACH OTHER'S STRIKES!
- 3 - DEFEND ALL WHO REFUSE TO CROSS



No. 250, Summer 2023

On Permanent Revolution

The Fight Against Imperialism Today

PRESENTATION BY
ANNA MILI FOR THE ICL

How to Make a Revolution in Oppressed Nations

I want to be clear about something. This debate is not a historical review of permanent revolution, but an inseparable part of the struggle to forge the Fourth International today. The fundamental question in relation to the nations of the world oppressed by the imperialist bourgeoisie is that the only solution in order to bring about national and social emancipation is workers revolution. And the only way this can be achieved is by forging communist parties to lead this struggle to success. I think that by posing the question this way, both organizations can claim some form of agreement.

But for Marxists, the question is not just preaching revolution. What is fundamental is *how workers revolution will be achieved*. What are the tasks of revolutionaries in the oppressed world—as well as in the imperialist countries—to advance this struggle, starting from day-to-day struggles and connecting them to the ultimate goal? For this to happen, the proletarian vanguard must put at the epicenter of its strategy the struggle for the national liberation of the oppressed nations from world imperialism, and not skip over the just national aspirations of the masses, ignoring them or even denouncing them as an obstacle to revolutionary class struggle and socialist revolution. And here lies our difference with the LFI. So, the focus of this presentation is going to be precisely that. How to advance the struggle for socialist revolution in the neocolonial world.



Nic Bothma/EPA-EFE; Sakis Mitrolidis/AFP

Top: South African women demand expropriation of imperialist-backed landowners, Cape Town, 2020. Bottom: Greek protest against imperialist-dictated austerity package, Thessaloniki, 2015.

The Basis of Oppression and the Material Reality of the Neocolonial World

To understand *why* the fight for national liberation is the motor force for revolution in an oppressed country it is crucial to understand the material reality in these countries. So, let me give you a picture of where I come from. Greece fought against the Ottoman Empire to establish an independent state, only to find itself under the yoke

of three “protecting powers.” The war of independence brought the Greek people not freedom but the dictatorial rule of Bavarian princes, imposed by the British, French and Russian ruling classes. In an astonishing irony with the Troika of our day, an International Finance Commission took charge and controlled Greek finances, stripping Greece of its sovereign powers. One financial bankruptcy followed another, and really very little remained for the

SPARTACIST
1 Ιουλίου 2015

Στο δημοψήφισμα λέμε:
Ψηφίστε ΟΧΙ!
Κάτω η ΕΕ!

Αποκηρύξτε το Ξεπούλημα του ΣΥΡΙΖΑ στην ΕΕ!
ΑΡΚΕΤΑ!

Αποκηρύξτε το ξεπούλημα του ΣΥΡΙΖΑ στην ΕΕ και στις τράπεζες. Η ΕΕ και το ευρώ είναι παγίδα θανάτου για τη συντριπτική πλειοψηφία του ελληνικού λαού. Η ΕΕ και το ευρώ πρέπει να απορριφθούν. Εργαζόμενοι, ανεργούμενοι, συνταξιούχοι— πρέπει να σηκώσουν τα όπλα τους και να πολεμήσουν για να πάρουν πίσω τον έλεγχο της χώρας. Αυτή η μάχη δεν μπορεί να κερδηθεί μόνο στα κοινοβουλευτικά πλαίσια. Καλούμε επίσης όλους να μην δώσουν την ψήφο τους για να συνεχιστεί η πολιτική της λιτότητας. Αυτή η πολιτική σκοτώνει τους λαούς της Ευρώπης και της Αμερικής. Αυτή η πολιτική σκοτώνει τους λαούς της Ευρώπης και της Αμερικής. Αυτή η πολιτική σκοτώνει τους λαούς της Ευρώπης και της Αμερικής.

Κοινοβουλευτική και η Τρίτακτη!

Χρήσιμες Εργατικές Επιτροπές Δράσης για να Πολεμήσουμε για:

- Διαγραφή του χρέους! Κάτω το ευρώ και η ΕΕ! Σύνδεση το Τρίτο Μνημόνιο!
- Κρατική τάξη κατά την Ελλάδα, τον Γερμανό και τον άλλον Ευρωπαίο εργάτη και στις ΗΠΑ, Μεξικό, Ουάντ και άλλους τους εργάτες της ΕΕ!
- Κατάργηση των εθνικών συντάξεων, για να γίνουν οι συντάξεις της ΕΕ κοινές και να μην υπάρχουν διαφορές μεταξύ των ΕΕ και των άλλων.

July 2015

Repudiate Syriza's Sellout to the EU!
ENOUGH!

Repudiate Syriza's sellout to the EU and the banks. The EU and its currency, the euro have been a tragic trap of suffering for the great bulk of the Greek people. The EU and euro must be repudiated. Communities composed of workers from different tendencies and their allies—youth, unemployed, immigrants, pensioners—must be set up throughout the country to struggle for this and toward a government which will act in the interests of the working people and be subordinated to them. This battle cannot be won within a parliamentary framework. We also call for the overthrow of the EU and the euro.

Καρία Υ

The Internationalist
No. 41
September-October 2015
50¢

September-October 2015

Referendum Ploy: Syriza Government Caves In to Eurobankers' Assault Diktat, Occupy the Banks and Ports!

Only Workers Revolution Will End Capitalist "Austerity"

Thousands jammed Syntagma (Constitution) Square in July 2 Communist Party (KKE) protest against the Greek government and of the Eurobankers and of the government led by SYRIZA.

ICL called for "no" vote in 2015 referendum on EU/IMF austerity to propel struggle against imperialism and expose Syriza. LFI told workers that their vote didn't matter, they had to fight for socialist revolution.

masses. Later in World War I, the imperialists blockaded Athens, starving the population and forcing Greece to enter the war. In World War II, the country was occupied by three forces: Italy, Germany and Bulgaria. The Nazi occupation was among the most brutal in Europe. When the Nazis left, the British first and then the U.S. took over, crushing the revolution. In 1967, a military dictatorship backed by the U.S. ruled the country for seven years.

And in our epoch—the epoch of the hegemony of the U.S.—the main hegemonic power, together with Germany, strangles the country through the “peaceful,” the liberal—plunder of finance capital. The workers fought tooth and nail against the imperialists from 2008 to 2015: endless general strikes, massive, militant. The masses directly confronted the imperialists and their Greek lackeys, demanding their liberation from imperialist bondage. The latest example: After a train crash last February, caused by the destruction of the railways by privatization, 57 people died, and a mass political strike took place against the imperialists and the government. From privatization of education, healthcare and ports, the closing of industry, attacks on workers’ rights and overthrowing the government in 2011 to a huge debt on the shoulders of the masses, the imperialists dictate and control every aspect of the political and economic life of the country, keeping it poor, underdeveloped and in a state of destitution. **This is what the material reality of Greece looks like; and, taking into consideration whatever differences there are in each country, this is the living picture for all the neocolonial world.**

Grounding our method in this materialist understanding, it is not hard to identify that the main enemy of the proletariat in oppressed nations *is* imperialism, *not* the national bourgeoisie. This is illustrated clearly in the struggles of the proletariat. Historically, class struggle in Greece is defined and pushed forward by the struggles of the proletariat and the broader masses of the oppressed against imperialist subjugation. It is this oppression and national humiliation that moves the masses. Their just national aspirations, their powerful anti-imperialist sentiment, their yearning for peace and a better life against the humiliation imposed by the imperialists give the proletariat’s struggles for the most basic demands an explosive character and are powerful weapons which need to be taken up by the proletariat vanguard to defeat imperialism and bring national and social liberation to the masses. As Trotsky wrote:

“Really to arouse the workers and peasants against imperialism is possible only by connecting their basic and most profound life interests with the cause of the country’s liberation.”

—“The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin”

The Role of the Bourgeoisie in the Neocolonial World

But in its struggle for its liberation, there is an obstacle, the national bourgeoisie. To understand its role—why and how it is an obstacle—it is necessary to show its material position. This is determined by combined and uneven development. The decisive forces in oppressed countries are the imperialists and the proletariat, not the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie is standing weak and trapped between the two, incapable of playing an independent role and forced to maneuver between the two. Seeking to resolve the democratic questions and develop the country to strengthen its position as a ruling class, it has to rely either on the imperialists, or on the proletariat to resist the imperialists. It is in the latter case when the bourgeoisie can take progressive measures like nationalizations that the bourgeoisie promotes illusions they can lead the struggle against imperialist subjugation.

At the same time, as a propertied class it is conscious that any independent struggle of the proletariat against the imperialists threatens its own class rule. This is why it has to maintain itself at the head of the national liberation struggle. Because of its ties to private property and in order to secure its class interests, in the end it suppresses the proletariat, betrays the anti-imperialist struggle and sides with the imperialists. Only by using this method is it possible to show why the bourgeoisie is a reactionary class and why the proletariat is the only class capable of liberating the nation from imperialism, resolving the democratic tasks under the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry. The national bourgeoisie is the *main political obstacle* but not the *main force to defeat*.

The Two Poles in the Workers Movement

In response to the bourgeoisie, two non-revolutionary poles in the workers movement have developed historically in Greece and in the world. One consists in supporting the bourgeoisie

under the pretext of fighting against imperialism. This trend views the bourgeoisie as the force that can bring freedom to the oppressed people, reflecting the right-wing expression of opportunism. A good example is the Greek Stalinists, who in the 1940s—in the name of fighting fascism—betrayed the heroic struggle of the workers and peasants, subordinating them to the Greek bourgeoisie and the “progressive” imperialists.

The other pole is a reaction to the first. On this side of the room [points to the LFI] and with the correct impulse of fighting against the national bourgeoisie, it rejects the anti-imperialist struggle altogether under the pretext of “class independence.” This is the expression of “left wing” opportunism—sectarianism. A good example is the Greek Trotskyists, who in the 1940s—in the name of pure class struggle and socialist revolution—denied any kind of national oppression. Ironically, today the two have flipped positions. The Trotskyists support the national bourgeoisie under the pretext of fighting imperialism, and the Stalinists reject the anti-imperialist struggle in the name of class independence.

Both trends are an obstacle to forging a Marxist pole in the neocolonies; and as two sides of the same coin, both end up leaving the national liberation struggle and the leadership of the masses in the hands of the national bourgeoisie. Both poles strengthen the grip of the nationalists on the masses, betraying *both* the national and social emancipation struggles.

The *only* revolutionary policy for the neocolonies is a Marxist pole: on that

side of the room [points to the ICL], a party which fights for the national liberation of the oppressed peoples of the world, *armed with the Leninist principle of class independence* as the only way to smash the nationalists, take the lead and direct the anti-imperialist struggle to its final conclusion, workers revolution. I want to insist: the only way to break the hold on the masses *is to compete* with the national bourgeoisie. This is not a new program invented by the ICL, comrades. It is an application of the Comintern’s Second and Fourth Congresses. I challenge the LFI to prove that the Comintern’s program, which generalized the experience of the October Revolution, was class-collaborationist and to publicly condemn it. The “Theses on the Eastern Question” is on the lit table, and everybody should read it and make their own conclusions.

The LFI Again Chooses Sectarianism

The LFI falls into the second of the two trends described above. It doesn’t deny that the neocolonial world is oppressed by imperialism, but this only speaks against it. Recognizing this oppression by imperialism—and even having orthodox formulations against it—in a sense is more deceitful since it masks its opportunism with left formulas preaching class struggle and revolution. However, what you will not find is *how* you will make one.

Both organizations agree that it is essential to combat nationalism. The question is: How? We see the national aspirations of the masses as the motor force, *as the heart of the revolution*,

which must be channeled and pushed forward through the revolutionary veins of the proletarian vanguard, made to beat harder and sweep away the arteriosclerotic and diseased body of capitalism. The LFI sees the national aspirations of the masses as something that needs to be suppressed, held back or even dropped, clogging the arteries, stopping the heart of the revolution, depriving it of breath. *This is our difference!* By rejecting the force which moves millions of oppressed into class struggle and ultimately socialist revolution, the LFI capitulates to the same force that it wants to combat, the nationalists, leaving the anti-imperialist struggle in their hands.

The LFI creates a false dilemma by contrasting the struggle against imperialist subjugation and the struggle for the overthrow of the national bourgeoisie. But every struggle that arouses the proletariat against the imperialists is a real step forward on the road to social liberation. The revolutionary struggle to break the imperialist yoke *does not weaken* but rather *strengthens* the political differentiation of classes. When the exploited masses stand on their feet confronting the imperialists, it inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the latter. To fight against imperialism, one must *necessarily* fight against the national bourgeoisie. The essence of permanent revolution and the tasks of communists consist not in rejecting the masses’ aspirations nor in the separation of class struggle and democratic demands but in the fusion of the democratic and socialist struggles under the communist banner. This is the epitome



V.K. Bulla



no credit

The Communist International established and elaborated on main task of revolutionaries in imperialist-subjugated countries—to fight for leadership of national liberation struggle—at its Second (left) and Fourth Congresses.

of the Transitional Program, the bridge to, or the stages of, the revolutionary class struggle.

Let's apply the LFI's method in the U.S. By its approach—class struggle rather than democratic demands—the black masses should drop their struggle for black liberation and fight only against their class oppression. But we all know, including the LFI, that you cannot even start to talk about class struggle in the U.S. separate from the struggle for black liberation. The fight for black liberation is inseparable from the struggle for workers revolution in the U.S. Taking this back to the neocolonies, the fight for national liberation is inseparable from the struggle for workers revolution. But no, for the LFI that is a capitulation to nationalism.

What does the LFI's position mean for the proletariat in the imperialist centers? The task for communists in the U.S. is to champion the national liberation struggles of the oppressed people. Only if the proletariat of the West fights for this principle will it manage to break the mistrust of the workers of the oppressed world and open the road for the revolutionary unity of the world proletariat. The LFI's position divides the world proletariat because it is not rallying the oppressed people to fight against imperialist enslavement, but tells them to temper their national aspirations. With this, any talk of building an international that fights imperialism is a fraud.

LFI: From Sectarianism to Social-Chauvinism

The LFI's program—and I am very happy to talk about the anti-imperialist united front—came out in practice during the Greek referendum in 2015. Brutal austerity by the EU/IMF had impoverished the Greek masses for years. The imperialists were pushing for more austerity. The masses were fighting back. Syriza, the leading party of the bourgeoisie in the government, was squeezed between the two and called for a referendum. The question was simple: Do you accept the austerity package of the EU/IMF or not? Syriza hoped that the masses would vote “yes,” aiming to have a popular mandate for the new austerity package, capitulating more to the imperialists and avoiding confrontation with the masses.

The imperialists were blackmailing the workers, shutting the banks to force



Thessaloniki, March 2023: Mass protest against deadly Tempe train crash, result of imperialist-imposed privatization and austerity. To push forward a working-class counteroffensive, ICL's Greek section called for a KKE/PAME workers government.



Murad Sezer/Reuters

them to accept the austerity and prevent them from voting “no.” But the Greek proletariat is well known for its courage and self-sacrifice. The LFI has a lot to learn from them. The blackmail by the imperialists and the bourgeoisie only drove the masses to massively reject the austerity package, saying to the imperialists *go to hell!*

As communists, we knew that Syriza would betray. The question was: Are you, like the LFI, going to stand on the sidelines, saying we don't have a side and calling on the workers to abstain and “occupy the ports!” instead or are you going *with the masses in the struggle*? Voting “no” was the only principled position: taking a stand against imperialism, using it as a weapon to push forward the struggle and exposing in the process before the masses who had illusions in Syriza every vacillation, capitulation and betrayal of the bourgeoisie. Syriza's betrayal was a golden opportunity to push forward a general offensive against all the masses' oppressors, foreign and local. That is the essence of the anti-imperialist united front.

The LFI's refusal to take a stand with the oppressed—from *Manhattan!*—on a clear-cut question, “Do you accept or not the austerity measures,” was a grotesque capitulation to the imperialists, like that of the KKE [Communist Party of Greece]. While rejecting the united front against imperialism, the KKE (echoed by the LFI) did not advance class independence, quite the opposite. In the name of “class independence”

from the Greek bourgeoisie, it left the mantle of “anti-imperialism” to Syriza, guaranteeing their continued hold on the masses. The LFI, rejecting the Leninist distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations, refused to oppose American and German imperialism, the main oppressors of Greece. This clearly shows that its struggle against imperialist oppression is, like Lenin said, “a dishonest facade, such as we see in the parties of the Second International.” When the LFI's sectarianism confronted reality, it transformed into social-chauvinism.

So, yes, we would make an anti-imperialist united front with AMLO,

Ο ΜΠΟΛΣΕΒΙΚΟΣ
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Publication of the
Trotskyist Group of Greece
No. 9, November 2024

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Erdogan, Modi—and not only when there is a war, but also in “peaceful” times. After all, “war is a continuation of policy by other means.” The tasks for revolutionaries in peace and in war are essentially the same. Taking a side with the oppressed and struggling to wrest leadership away from the bourgeoisie, to lead the masses to liberation from all their oppressors. And if the LFI thinks—like comrade Negrete—that just by saying in a war, “we have a military side, and we give no political support,” that class independence is guaranteed, then they close their eyes to the naked truth of class struggle. The only way to secure the political independence of the proletarian party is to put forward an independent proletarian perspective *in deeds, within the struggle*, not standing on the sidelines screaming for revolution.

On the LFI’s accusing the ICL of class collaboration, I will reply with the “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions” at the Second Congress of the Comintern, written by Lenin himself, and again I challenge the LFI to condemn him. He writes:

“The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form.”

A Nice Quote from Comrade Negrete

I want to end with a beautiful quote, a really beautiful quote, that captures powerfully many of the points made in this presentation. It says:

“In Latin America the most powerful and dominant oppressor and exploiter is clearly Yankee imperialism. It is often the direct employer of the workers. Its IMF dictates starvation austerity policy. [...] The so-called ‘national’ bourgeoisie is organically the lackey, the servant of the imperialists; their branch-office manager at most. When this or that section of the bourgeoisie uses ‘anti-imperialist’ rhetoric, it is to tighten its grip on the masses, the better to subordinate them in reality to imperialism. The dictators are usually open puppets. [...] *In these senses imperialism is the dominant, strongest, most resourceful and stable enemy, i.e., the main enemy.*” [emphasis added]

I could not have said it better, comrade Negrete. It’s from you, your letter. This is a letter you wrote in 1984,

and you were smashed because you touched on fundamental problems with our program. But back then you were thinking as a Marxist, not as a cynical, bitter petty-bourgeois history professor thinking of the past. You were thinking as a Marxist. We urge you to reconsider it in this light and join us.

PRESENTATION BY JAN NORDEN FOR THE LFI

Hands Off Trotsky’s Permanent Revolution!

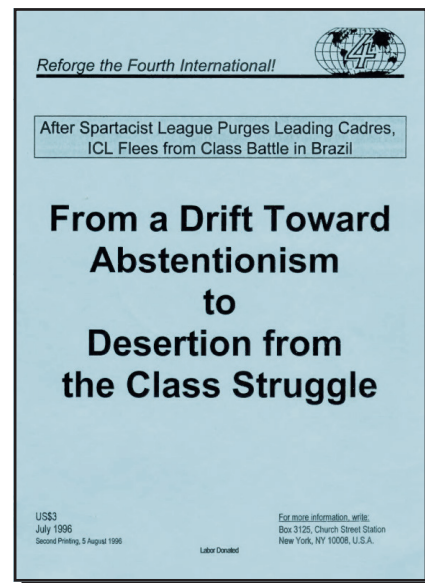
So what we are discussing here today is how what we have called the born-again International Communist League and the Spartacist League in the United States have abandoned, renounced, denounced and vilified one key plank after another in the revolutionary Trotskyist program that the Spartacist tendency upheld against all manner of opportunists for three decades. We have explained before how the degeneration of the ICL reflected the wave of demoralization of the left set off by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, undermined by decades of Stalinist bureaucratic misrule, and of the bureaucratically deformed workers states of the East European Soviet bloc. With its new leadership, the ICL has now reached terminal degeneration, so that it renounces the very program on which it was founded.

As the ICL sank into passive propaganda, abstentionism and ultimately betrayal in the class struggle, capitulating to the bourgeoisie’s “death of communism” lie, those long-time cadres who it expelled in 1996 went on to found the Internationalist Group and two years later joined with comrades in Brazil, France and Mexico to form the League for the Fourth International. While the IG and LFI continue to fight for the revolutionary program the Spartacist tendency stood for, the latter-day ICL, for its part, went into a prolonged crisis, which continues to this day, repeatedly changing leaderships and programmatically gyrating like a top.

Beginning almost immediately after our expulsions, this latter-day ICL began revising and gutting its former program. We’ve already talked about the string of betrayals: abandoning Brazilian Trotskyist workers’ historic 1996 struggle

to oust the police from the unions, abandoning the call for Puerto Rican independence, “anti-American” baiting the LFI for calling for the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Afghanistan, supporting the U.S. invasion of Haiti, and that’s only a small part of them. There is a common thread to all these betrayals, and it’s not disorientation because of the 1992 [ICL] conference document. It’s capitulation to U.S. imperialism, which continues today as they refuse to defend Russia in the face of the united imperialist proxy war over Ukraine. You claim that there has always been a unipolar imperialist world. Well, there has been at the present time, and what do you do? You refuse to defend the countries that are being attacked by that united imperialist offensive.

I want to reiterate that, because in discussing the question of *permanent revolution*, which is the topic of this debate, we are not having an academic discussion. What we have here are counterposed class programs, proletarian internationalist in the case of the LFI vs. bourgeois nationalist for the ICL. So *Spartacist* No. 68 came out at the beginning of September [2023], where the leaders of the ICL declare that the political organization they have taken over was “deformed at birth” on the central question of permanent revolution, supposedly because of “denial of revolutionary leadership of the national liberation struggle.” According to the new ICL, the Spartacist tendency was



1996 bulletin by IG founders documents their bureaucratic purge from the ICL.

some kind of thalidomide baby, a caricature of Trotskyism that betrayed at every turn.

So what is Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution? This is not just a phrase about the revolution continuing indefinitely, but a theory based on his evaluation of the class forces in the first Russian Revolution of 1905, which then became the program of the Russian October Revolution of 1917, and which Trotsky later generalized to colonial, semicolonial and other countries of belated capitalist development under imperialist domination. In a nutshell, and I'm quoting here, "The theory of the Permanent Revolution, which is basic to our movement, declares that in the modern world the bourgeois-democratic revolution cannot be completed except through the victory and extension of the proletarian revolution." I quote this summary because it comes from the 1963 document "Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International," the founding document of the Spartacist tendency, which we in the LFI uphold and the reborn ICL will surely renounce, sooner or later, as it is incompatible with their present distortion and negation of permanent revolution.

The Spartacist tendency was founded on the authentic program of permanent revolution and upheld it against all the pseudo-Trotskyists like Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel starting in the early 1950s, and a decade later joined by the leaders of the U.S. Socialist Work-

SPARTACIST (English Edition)
SEPTEMBER 2023

In Defense of Permanent Revolution



WHAT IS THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION?

The following document was adopted by the ICL's Eighth International Conference. The epoch of imperialism is characterized by the division of the world between a large number of oppressed countries and a handful of oppressor countries that are economically and militarily dominant. The current world situation is characterized by the hegemony of U.S. imperialism which, in alliance with the other imperialist powers (Germany, Britain, France, Japan), subjugates the enormous mass of the world population through the export of

finance capital. The old days of colonial empires, with their naked open plunder of colonies, have faded their place to the pillage of countries which are formally independent but are in fact economically or dependent states held in bondage by the economic and military hegemony of the "great" powers. In most countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and East Europe, it is not the national bourgeoisie but the imperialist class who control and dictate every aspect of economic and social development. (continued on page 39)

For Communist Leadership of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle!

From: Jacoby van den Bruggen, 2014. South African miners strike, Marikana, 2014. Inset: Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky, who developed program of permanent revolution, addressing Red Army soldiers in 1920.

Spartacist No. 68, September 2023
spartacist.org/en/68/permrev



"I had to argue that Lenin had not come over to my point of view, but had developed his own, and that the course of events, by substituting arithmetic for algebra, had revealed the essential identity of our views. And that is what really happened." —Trotsky, *My Life* (1929)

L.Ya. Leonidov

As early as April 1917, Trotsky argued to other Bolsheviks that the difference between his theory of permanent revolution and Lenin's line of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry was a matter of prognoses.

ers Party who abandoned the fight for workers revolution led by a Bolshevik-Leninist vanguard, and instead tailed after non-proletarian forces. Today the ICL under new management—which pulled off what in the business world would be called a hostile takeover with the acquiescence of a demoralized Spartacist old guard—draws its arguments from the various pseudo-Trotskyists, but with an important difference: whereas the Pabloites, Mandelites and so on capitulated to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists and populists, this new crop of revisionists actually are "nation-building" nationalists masquerading in Trotskyist garb.

To carry out their cynical operation they have to resort to blatantly falsifying history. We saw this already in their 2017 "Hydra" document where in the name of defending oppressed nations they tried to present their advocacy of discriminatory, anti-democratic language laws as Leninism on the national question, when Lenin emphatically said the opposite, opposing official privileging of any language, including of the oppressed.

On permanent revolution, *Spartacist* 68 claims that "From 1905 to 1917, there was an essential identity between Trotsky's permanent revolution and Lenin's strategic line expressed in the formula of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'." It claims that the different formulas were

only "prognoses" and a "nuance," and that by 1917 Lenin's "algebraic" slogan was "outlived" and had to be substituted by the more "arithmetic" program of "all power to the Soviets." In other words, no big deal.

The attempt to pass this off as authentic Trotskyism is rank cynicism. Those of us who were won to Trotskyism away from the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the peasantry and the proletariat," which we called in shorthand the "RDDPP," anyone who went through that experience instantly spotted this ploy. In the correspondence leading up to this debate, the LFI pointed out that in his 1905 pamphlet *Two Tactics of the Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* Lenin stated that his call was explicitly for a "democratic, not a socialist" regime, and how Trotsky in his 1939 essay on "Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution" contrasted his call for permanent revolution both to Lenin's formula and that of the Mensheviks. So I suggest you can consult those sources.

As for the reborn ICL's claim that Lenin's coming over to the programmatic conclusion of Trotsky's permanent revolution—namely to fight for workers revolution, for the dictatorship of the proletariat—was just a matter of replacing an outdated prognosis, Trotsky wrote at length in his 1930 *History of the Russian Revolution*, in Chapter 16 on "Rearming the Party,"

about the tremendous struggle that took place after Lenin issued his 1917 “April Theses” calling for “all power to the soviets.” This was ferociously resisted by Kamenev, Stalin and the other “Old Bolsheviks” who clung to the old formula, which called for completing “the first stage of a bourgeois revolution.” The point is, *had the program of a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” not been defeated, there would have been no October Revolution!* And that’s what you claim was essentially the same.

So the ICL under new management is lying about differences between Lenin’s program and Trotsky’s leading up to the 1917 Russian Revolution, and when people lie about big issues, it’s for a purpose. The purpose in this case is quite clear, underlined by their embrace of the call for an “anti-imperialist united front”—namely that they want to make political blocs with bourgeois nationalists, from the populist government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico—which they pretend is somehow anti-imperialist, when in fact AMLO is acting as a border guard for the U.S., both under Trump and now Biden—to the African National Congress which presides over the neo-apartheid regime on behalf of international capital. And they also want to make a political bloc, in the name of such a so-called “united front,” with [Greek prime minister Alexis] Tsipras and SYRIZA in Greece.

The new crew at the helm of the ICL try to pretend that they are presenting the real deal even when they are transparently negating Trotsky’s program. *Spartacist* [68] talks, repeatedly, of “the core of permanent revolution: placing the struggle for national liberation at the center of revolutionary strategy for the neocolonial world.” In another place it says that “the experience of 1917, speaks to the *fundamental core of permanent revolution*, which is nothing other than the need for *communist leadership of the democratic struggle*, first and foremost national liberation.” So the essence of the 1917 Russian October Revolution was a democratic struggle for national liberation? What garbage! For what nation? The Russian nation, the Polish nation, the Finnish nation? And the experience of 1917 was essentially a “democratic struggle”? Whatever happened to the proletariat taking power?

The most striking case of a tendency that “revised” permanent revolution was that of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party. In late 1981, Doug Jenness, the editor of the SWP’s newspaper *The Militant*, published an article, “How Lenin Saw the Russian Revolution” essentially equating permanent revolution with Lenin’s RDDPP, the same sleight-of-hand the ICL is carrying out today. Ernest Mandel replied with a long article stressing the difference between Lenin’s formula from 1905, which foresaw the workers and peasants leading a bourgeois revolution, and Trotsky’s program pointing to workers revolution. Jenness responded with an even longer article in mid-1982 claiming that the October 1917 revolution was actually the RDDPP, not a workers revolution but a democratic revolution. And a few months later SWP leader Jack Barnes came out against permanent revolution altogether in his speech on “Their Trotsky and Ours.”

What was driving the SWP’s evolution was the desire to join with Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress in South Africa as the anti-apartheid movement was heating up. And we see the same with the ICL today. Like the SWP, the new ICL wants to push to implement the ANC’s Freedom Charter, which was a program for a bourgeois-democratic revolution, although with some fairly radical social measures. Incidentally, the Charter was written by supporters of the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP) whose watchword

of a “national democratic revolution,” like Lenin’s RDDPP, did not go beyond the bounds of capitalism. And when the reborn ICL calls to implement the Freedom Charter, as their new South African paper does, that is in fact the position of the SACP and the ANC, whose maintenance of superexploitation of black labor was symbolized in the 2012 Marikana massacre [of mine workers]. But where Lenin, with his formula, was fighting for revolution against the bourgeoisie, the South African CP, which you are tailing, is essentially fighting to administer that neo-apartheid capitalist exploitation.

There is much more to be said about the ICL’s new “anti-imperialist” clothes in Mexico. Its call for a “united front” with the government of AMLO [Andrés Manuel López Obrador] and his MORENA party would stand in the way of the necessary struggle to break workers away from this nationalist, but in no way anti-imperialist, government, which is now trying to force the so-called “independent” unions back into the straitjacket of corporatist state control of labor. Once again, as in equating the RDDPP with permanent revolution, the ICL leaders justify this with a subterfuge, conflating Trotsky’s call for independent proletarian support for the expropriation of imperialist-owned oil companies with making a political bloc with the government of Lázaro Cárdenas [president of Mexico from 1934 to 1940], which Trotsky never called for. With its vague talk of national liberation and nation-building, the newborn



Russian Embassy in Türkiye

Soviet Union supported Türkiye’s war of independence against imperialists and their Greek lackeys. Pictured: Soviet ambassador (left) with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (center) in 1922.

Expropriation Of Oil Lands Opens New Era For Mexican Workers

Cardenas Move Is Step Forward: Workers In
This Country Must Give Full Support
To Mexican Working Class

With the expropriation of the American and British oil companies by the Cardenas government, the year-long struggle between the foreign capitalists and the Mexican working class has ended. Cardenas has opposed.

no tankers, would be forced to find customers and shippers in fascist countries, Japan, Germany, and Italy, whose policies Cardenas has opposed.

"The Socialist Workers Party wholeheartedly supports the expropriation of the oil companies and calls upon the American working class to back up this action against the machinations of the oil interests and the interventions of their respective governments. We support the efforts of the Mexican workers to gain independent control of oil fields against all those within and without Mexico who aim to curb their class action."

—*Socialist Appeal*, 26 March 1938



AGN; INAH (inset)

Mass mobilization in defense of 1938 oil nationalization by Lázaro Cárdenas (inset). Left: U.S. Trotskyists saluted this expropriation, calling on workers across South and North America to jointly struggle against U.S. imperialism.

ICL's program would be a roadblock to revolution if it had any impact, which luckily it doesn't. If anyone agreed with the line of *El [Antiimperialista]*, the bourgeois name of their new paper, they would join AMLO's MORENA party and push from within.

So here, there and just about everywhere, the line of the new ICL—which now repudiates just about everything the Spartacist tendency represented when it fought for the revolutionary program of Trotskyism—would have terrible consequences if carried out in the class struggle. Nowhere is this clearer than over Iran where they denounce the Spartacist tendency's warnings against leftist support for the 1979 so-called "Islamic revolution." They take a quotation out of context to pretend that we equated Khomeini with Hitler when its point was that there can be reactionary mass movements. There were some problems with the initial formulations on Iran before we settled on the call for "Down with the shah, No to the mullahs." But we told the truth about the mullah regime, whereas *Spartacist* 68 pretends they were leading an anti-imperialist struggle.

That was in fact the line of almost the entire opportunist left, from "Islamic Marxists" to Stalinists to pseudo-Trotskyists. And many acted on this as leftists streamed back to Tehran after

spending years in exile to escape the dreaded SAVAK, the secret police of the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Shah Pahlavi. But almost immediately there were extensive arrests of leftists, followed by a wave of tens of thousands jailed in 1981, of whom hundreds, perhaps several thousand, were executed in 1988. The Stalinist Tudeh party, which had led striking oil workers into the arms of Khomeini, was rewarded by having its offices closed and its paper banned in 1979, with mass arrests of over 1,000 Tudeh members in 1982-83, with 45 of them executed as supposed Soviet spies.

Because the then-revolutionary Spartacist tendency was not taken in by the fool's gold of bourgeois "anti-imperialism" and fought for workers revolution, we were able to warn against the impending slaughter, while the opportunists, as we wrote at the time, "bowed before their executioners." And from the beginning, while politically opposing the "Islamic republic" we defended Iran against imperialist and Zionist attacks, threats and sanctions, including calling, as we do today, for Iran's right to have nuclear weapons to deter and defend against the nuclear-armed U.S. and Israeli warmongers.

A couple of final comments: First, the new ICL leaders never knew the Spartacist tendency when it stood for genu-

ine revolutionary Trotskyism—not that this would make a difference, as they are deeply wedded to their nationalist politics. The latter-day ICL they came to know had plenty of imperialist chauvinist aspects to their line—like declaring in Mexico, a U.S. semi-colony, that "the main enemy is at home." This was never the position of the revolutionary ICL, and in fact that line was cooked up to go after the Internationalist Group in the U.S. and Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico.

Secondly, the Spartacist tendency and ICL, when they stood for revolutionary Trotskyism, told the truth to the masses and fought for proletarian revolution, while the born-again ICL tries to hoodwink them with vague talk of national liberation, copied from the Stalinists who were past masters in pushing this line in order to disguise their refusal to fight for socialist revolution. This was true from Latin America to South [Africa] and Vietnam, where almost the entire left called for national liberation while the SL called for "All Indochina Must Go Communist." Perhaps you will want to reject that slogan as well, as being "sectarian."

Leninists and Trotskyists have always been sticklers for programmatic clarity. Seemingly small differences in political formulas can have enormous consequences in the class struggle. As we

said earlier, the reborn ICL has done us, and the workers movement, a favor by making clear that they are not, in fact, the heirs of the Spartacist tendency that fought for revolutionary Trotskyism. They are its antithesis. The League for the Fourth International and its national sections today represent the revolutionary political continuity of authentic Trotskyism and Leninism. We have consistently put forward programs for revolutionary internationalist struggle, from picket lines mean don't cross, to workers strikes against imperialist wars, to calling for defense of Gaza and the Palestinian Arab people coupled with the fight for an Arab-Hebrew Palestinian workers state in a socialist federation of the Middle East.

The new ICL, in contrast, is putting forward one gimmick after another, many a transparent call for class collaboration while others are just nonsensical. So when you see *Spartacist* on their publications, we counsel *caveat emptor*—buyer beware.

And in conclusion, let me say: *Hands off Trotsky's permanent revolution!*

SELECT FLOOR INTERVENTIONS

LFI speaker

I'm from Grupo Internacionalista de México. The people's front is not a tactic, it's the biggest betrayal. The Spartacist League and the ICL have abandoned this basic understanding—a cornerstone of revolutionary Marxism—with the recovery of the "anti-imperialist united front" policy.

Yes, as your program still says, this formula is used by Stalinists and other reformists to form political blocs with the bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries like Mexico and many, many others.

Do you want to talk about concretes? What would it imply to make a political alliance with López Obrador and Morena in Mexico today? Let's face it directly. Nowadays, there is a strike by high school teachers in Mexico City. Do you know that? Who are the bosses? The Morena government in the capital. This implies that when the teachers are demonstrating in the streets, Morena, López Obrador and the mayor of Mexico City have a presence in the streets. And you know where? In the batons and the shields of the cops. So, you are calling on the Mexican workers to make a political alliance in the name of anti-imperialism with the bosses of the cops that are trying to break the teachers strike.

This is perfectly concrete. This is not words. So, what should we do? What we revolutionary Marxists do, in this case is fight against the bosses with a program of political independence, of extending the strike to other teachers unions, but mainly to the hard core of the Mexican proletariat.

This is extremely important. What would it imply to make this political alliance with López Obrador in Mexico, whose main political goal is to reconstruct, to rebuild, the corporate system of social control? If you say that you are going to make this alliance, you are disarming the workers in front of this bourgeois politician and his populist bourgeois party. This is not

a matter of words. This is a matter of a living struggle nowadays taking place in Mexico.

Which side are you on?

ICL speaker

I am from the Grupo Espartaquista de México. I want to talk about permanent revolution from the Mexican perspective; but for that, one must understand the history of the country. Mexico lost half of its territory to the U.S. It has been invaded several times by the U.S. The IMF imposes austerity and starvation measures on Mexico. The debt is unbearable. U.S. imperialism is the direct employer of most of the workers.

NAFTA and now the USMCA have devastated Mexico, forcing millions to flee to the U.S., and I can keep going. It is crystal clear that the imperialist yoke determines every aspect of the political, economic and cultural life in Mexico. The whole history of the Mexican people has been one of resistance to imperialist plunder. Thus, a struggle for national emancipation is the motor force for a socialist revolution in that country. Or as Trotsky put it, the anti-imperialist struggle is key to liberation.

This is why we in the GEM decided to call our new paper *El Antiimperialista*. Every IG member knows about this history, but they consciously counterpose socialist revolution to the struggle for national liberation. The IG says that our perspective—and even the name of our paper—is nationalist, as Norden said. To think that it is nationalist to put the struggle against imperialism at the center of our program in the main U.S. semi-colony is not simply a capitulation

SPARTACIST

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to U.S. imperialism, but also to the populists by leaving them unchallenged at the head of the masses. The main obstacle now to the struggle for national and social emancipation is López Obrador, one of the most popular heads of state in the world who had sown massive illusions that the bourgeoisie can lead some sort of struggle, or resistance, against imperialist subjugation.

Denying this, as the IG speakers did today, is just disarming. The only way to break the influence of bourgeois nationalism is to push forward the struggle for national liberation to its ultimate consequences, showing how the bourgeoisie betrays the fight against imperialism, exposing before the masses every vacillation and capitulation of AMLO. The question of leadership is posed pointblank.

As Trotsky put it, we are in permanent competition with the national bourgeoisie as the only leadership which is capable of assuring the victory of the masses in the fight against the foreign imperialists. Refusing to do this means leaving the anti-imperialist fight to AMLO. The IG just promotes abstract "unite and fight" liberal internationalism while denouncing the struggle against imperialism as nationalist.

No! Proletarian internationalism between the American proletariat and the Mexican oppressed masses can only be forged through joint struggle against their common enemy, U.S. imperialism. What about our former position on the Malvinas-Falklands war that the IG upholds? British imperialism attacked neocolonial Argentina, and their position is to be for the defeat of both.

Another capitulation to imperialism! If Argentina had been victorious, that would have given a mighty impulse to the national and democratic consciousness of the country and would have led to the overthrow of the junta dictatorship.

However, our defective position left the junta at the head of the anti-imperialist sentiment. That is the exact opposite of permanent revolution.

LFI speaker

I was won over to the LFI on the question of permanent revolution in South Africa. Previously, I had been a member of the SWP and YSA. The ICL's revisions on this question parallel pseudo-Trotskyists in South Africa in the 1980s. They say that they want to implement the Freedom Charter, which they admit, correctly, is a bourgeois document. But they want to implement it. They want to take the place of the ANC and the EFF and lead the nation-building project. This is not permanent revolution. This is a stagist approach, which will lead to and does lead to class collaboration.

In the 1980s in South Africa, there was a very real prospect for proletarian revolution, and the would-be revolutionaries took the position that you are now taking today. So, what we want in the LFI is political independence of the working class and to struggle against the capitalists.

Permanent revolution is not about nation-building. Principally, it's about solving the democratic tasks that can be solved not under the bourgeoisie, but under the auspices of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Your literature

does not say that. What it says is that you want to lead the nation-building struggle, right? It says you want to lead the nation-building struggle and then sometime distant in the future, there will be socialism.

You do mention socialism at the end. You don't mention the dictatorship of the proletariat nor in the South African case do you mention a black-centered workers state. That has been jettisoned as well. So, the contemporary ICL, their position is not actually that dissimilar from elements of COSATU—the major trade-union federation—and the SACP who to this day say that they want to implement the NDR, the national democratic revolution, which includes the Freedom Charter.

So, what is your fundamental difference? There really is not one, right? There really is not. It's very difficult reading your literature of the time to see any difference.

ICL speaker

I'm from the British section of the ICL. I'd like to step back a little bit and comment a little bit on the discussion from the two competing groups here, as well as the presentations.

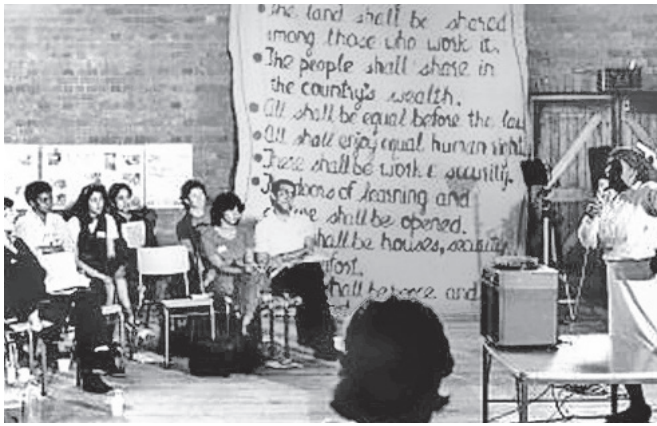
So, on the one hand, our comrade talked about our tasks. What are the tasks of revolutionaries when it comes to the problem of revolution in the neocolonial countries? That task is to fight for leadership of the national liberation struggle, of the democratic struggles, fusing them together with the socialist struggle, using them as a lever for socialist revolution. And she motivated

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Left: Unveiled in Kliptown, South Africa in 1955, Freedom Charter called for country's wealth to belong to the people. Right: Populist EFF rally in 2019 raised demands still not met. Nationalist leadership is barrier to national and social liberation.

that liberation for the neocolonies has to put the struggle against imperialism at the heart of the revolutionary strategy.

On the other hand, comrade Norden, you spoke, I don't know, about many things, but all of it was really defined by sticking to rigid formulas, reading the *History of the Russian Revolution* as if it was a sacred text. Let me tell you, that book also has a chapter on "The Problem of Nationalities" by the way, which you apparently said was garbage. The problem of nationalities played a fundamental role in the Russian Revolution.

And on the April Theses, it's not about the formula of what Lenin said or what Trotsky said, but it's about what the tasks were. Both of them did share an essential identity in that they were both fighting for the proletariat to be the hegemonic force that would lead the revolution.

Now, I just want to conclude by talking very quickly about the slogan "the main enemy is at home." You call us class-collaborationist, claiming that to struggle against imperialism is class-collaborationist. Now, I would just like us all to conduct a little imaginary experiment. Go to a peasant or a worker in the Third World. Tell them that to fight against imperialism is class-collaborationist. You know what you would be doing? You would be handing them on a platter to the nationalists, thereby reinforcing the hold of the key obstacle to the fight for national liberation, to the fight for socialist revolution.

And that's what was precisely the problem with our intervention on Iran. We denounced the mullahs. That was correct, but what about the struggle

against imperialism? That was what was absent in our entire approach to Iran. What we repudiate about our intervention in Iran is not that we denounced the left. The left did play a criminal role. But we denounce the fact that we did not actually use the aspirations of the Iranian masses to struggle against imperialism to actually show that the mullahs were an obstacle to their aspirations.

And on the anti-imperialist united front, it's like you guys don't understand what we're trying to say. Again, it's about program. We cited a quote from Trotsky. He said he would make a united front with the devil and his grandmother. Okay, so now was Trotsky being class-collaborationist? You decide, are you slandering Trotsky or us? I don't know. But in fact, how are you ever going to expose the nationalists if you do not engage in those united fronts in the course of the struggle, exposing their vacillations?

ICL speaker

I'm from Spartacist South Africa. We proudly stand on the radical implementation of the Freedom Charter. And the South African proletariat better lean on that program if it's to lead a struggle for national liberation and overthrow the Randlords together with their imperialist backers.

What is so objectionable about the Freedom Charter? Is it nationalization of the mines and banks or the general democratic questions that speak to emancipation of women, land reform? Yes, it is not our program. We proudly say that. It is a radical bourgeois program. You comrades act like Lenin

did not carry out the Socialist Revolutionaries' program on the land question. Opposing nation-building in neocolonial or other countries is nothing but a naked capitulation to imperialism.

This refusal to admit that imperialist domination gives rise to national democratic tasks, which the proletariat can leverage in its fight for social emancipation, means counterposing, for the millionth time, a fight for socialist revolution to national liberation. For us in South Africa, you know what that means? Dismissing a fight for black liberation. That puts you squarely in the camp of the racist Randlords. Okay? The white ruling class—that is, white domination.

And when you look at the actual tasks that are posed for the proletariat—or the South African proletariat has to

"The historical mission of national liberation can be only the class struggle." —Leon Trotsky

AMABOLSHEVIKI AMNYAMA

Revolutionary Communist League (South Africa)

GNU = Government of National Oppression

How We Got Here, How to Fight Back

Government of Apartheid South Africa (left) Apartheid South Africa. GNU disarms cops, arms to workers, arms to the people, cutting off food and water to hospitals (top right) and to the people (bottom right).

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confront in the course of fighting for national liberation—you have to deal with addressing artificial colonial-drawn borders that have nothing to do with the black masses. You have to deal with instituting industrial development. For example, rolling out roads, building, you know, other means of communication to overcome colonial- or imperialist-dictated underdevelopment. And that is nothing short of consolidating a nation, okay?

Even more, consider the land question and the system of chieftaincy. These abject tools of neo-apartheid—loved by all manner of petty-bourgeois nationalists—are an obstacle to expropriation of the land without compensation. You know, they prevent black women from inheriting the lands of their deceased husbands on the pretext of tradition. Do you trust that these tools can be expropriated and swept aside without challenging and competing with the nationalist forces for the leadership of the national liberation struggle by putting forward a proletarian-centered revolutionary strategic fight against imperialism?

Obviously not. Trotsky wrote his South African comrades in the 1930s, imploring them that they must, through proletarian methods, boldly take the solution of the national problem in their hands. It cannot be otherwise. “The historical weapon of the national liberation struggle can be only the *class struggle*.” That’s what our masthead says.

SUMMARY BY JAN NORDEN

There’s a lot to say and I don’t have enough time. I do want to answer on the question of Greece. The struggle in Greece is not for national liberation, it’s for international socialist revolution together with all the countries in Europe. The Greek Civil War was fought on the program of national liberation by the Stalinists—when it should have been a struggle for international communist revolution—and that program, together with the Stalinists, prevented the struggle for a Balkan socialist federation at the time. There is no separate national bourgeoisie or comprador bourgeoisie in Greece. Greece is a sub-imperialist power. It controls much of the world’s shipping, it is a banking presence in Eastern Europe, and Alex Tsipras proved that there is



Military Sealift Command



U.S. Embassy Greece

Contrary to comrade Norden, Greece is subjugated by U.S. imperialism. Left: Greek port used by U.S. military to reinforce domination of eastern Mediterranean. Right: U.S. ambassador announces American bidders for privatization of the port, December 2021.

no separation between the national bourgeoisie and the other bourgeoisies of the imperialist European Union.

On the [2015 Greek] referendum, this was known beforehand, it was perfectly obvious that this was a maneuver by Tsipras to get a “no” vote to bargain with the bankers, after which he would capitulate to them. We called for abstention because this was a ploy, this was a fraud, and you participated in that fraud. We did not just call for abstention, we called for workers action, for occupying the ports, for occupying the hospitals, for shutting down the railroads. That is workers action against the imperialist oppression of the Greek working people and all Greek people through their austerity program. What you did, is you tailed after the bourgeois nationalists.

Secondly, someone asked about communist leadership in the national liberation movement. We call for socialist revolution to resolve national oppression and the imperialist stranglehold. To pretend that you can have national liberation without socialist revolution is a fraud and a lie that you are hoodwinking people with. The speaker from the British section of the ICL said how can you expose the bourgeois nationalists if you don’t engage in united fronts. We intervene in the struggles against imperialist domination to expose the nationalists.

On the IBT’s [referring to the “International Bolshevik Tendency”] proposal for some kind of a conference, I would say simply, there is no family of Spartacism any more than there is a

family of Trotskyism or a family of the left, and you’re not going to build a revolutionary party by a Spartacist family reunion but only by the intransigent struggle for the program that the Spartacist tendency was founded on, which the ICL has now renounced and which the two branches of the BT and IBT fled from at the start of the anti-Soviet Cold War. In terms of the comparison of the trial of Socorro with the trial of Bill Logan: Bill Logan was guilty as charged, Socorro was persecuted.

And on Malvinas, the support of the Argentine nationalist left to the military adventure of the generals is what sank the possibility of workers revolution in Argentina. There was a burgeoning workers movement at that time. The generals called their adventure in order to head it off. The left bought it. And then when it was defeated, a wave of defeatism seized Argentina. And it was because the left supported that war it was the bourgeoisie that profited from the fall of the junta.

SUMMARY BY ANNA MILI

First of all, comrade Norden, in your presentation you said it will not be an academic debate. But actually, you didn’t point any way forward.

I would like to say something. In “Results and Prospects,” Trotsky wrote that Marxism is above all a method of analysis—*not* analysis of texts, but analysis of *social relations*. Your presentation, the majority of it,

was basically an analysis of texts. How to prove that you're not based on material reality? You think that Greece is an imperialist country.

I'm sorry I'm going to say this. But if you actually think—with the key events that I put forward (it's not all the history of Greece)—that Greece is not oppressed by imperialism and actually rules the world together with the U.S. bourgeoisie, then really you need to drop out of politics or go with the Communist Party of Greece. But I suggest you do the first.

It's incredible. About Mexico, you should read Trotsky and how he says the revolutionary struggle of Mexico is really to *compete* with the national bourgeoisie. That's what he says about Mexico, and actually Trotsky defended the nationalizations of Cárdenas against the imperialists.

I have a quote here about Mexico and Latin America. Trotsky writes in the article "Anti-imperialist Struggle Is the Key to Liberation": "It is clear to me at any rate that the internal tasks of these countries cannot be resolved without the simultaneous revolutionary struggle against imperialism." Condemn him, *condemn him!* About the anti-imperialist united front, it's only against imperialism, it's not against the workers. It's not about the workers supporting the bourgeoisie, but to expose the bourgeoisie, to expose them. About the referendum, ours is a socialist position. I'll explain what my presentation did and what yours did.

My presentation was Marxist, based on social relations. It gave the *material basis* for all the oppression, showed a picture of the country, then showed how the proletariat's struggles reflect that oppression. It showed that this is the motor force for revolution; and in the Civil War in Greece, that's what happened. But it was under false leadership, class-collaborationist. And the Greek Trotskyists, in reaction to that, they *rejected* this struggle. They rejected taking a side with ELAS [Greek People's Liberation Army] against the British. They rejected taking a side with ELAS against the Wehrmacht. And they left the anti-imperialist struggle to the Stalinists and to the national bourgeoisie. And, because of that, we are starting here, now, without a socialist revolution in Greece.

So, what's your answer? How do you break the masses from nationalism?



Athens, December 1944: British troops round up Communist militants at outset of Civil War. Greek Trotskyists left anti-imperialist struggle to Stalinists, who sabotaged socialist revolution by collaborating with national bourgeoisie.

You said nothing today, *nothing*. How are you going to actually make a revolution in Greece? How? Nothing on that issue, *nothing*. Because your "material reality" is not material reality, it's just ideas, some text from Trotsky, some text from Lenin. But let me tell you why material reality is very important. Okay, you need to draw your tasks. How are you going to draw your tasks? I'll give you an example.

Everybody here goes to work every day, I think, right? So before they go to work, they open their window, and they see: Is it raining or is it sunny? Should I put my boots on? Should I take an umbrella or should I put on sunglasses? It's as simple as that, how you draw your tasks as revolutionaries. And then in my presentation, after explaining the struggles of the proletariat, it flows naturally that the national bourgeoisie is the main obstacle to defeat, but the main enemy is imperialism.

And for that reason, because you cannot understand the material reality of combined and uneven development, it is a jingle for you—you cannot understand this: that combined and uneven development determines the role of the bourgeoisie and how illusions spread exactly because of that.

What you reject is the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle. Why? Because comrade Norden, and this really is the root of opportunism, you believe that the masses *cannot* break from nationalism under a communist leadership. And it shows how you underestimate the masses and the strength of the proletarian vanguard.

And it shows insecurity about your own program, because you don't know how to make a revolution in the neocolonies. All shades of opportunism are, in the last analysis, reducible to an incorrect evaluation of the revolutionary forces and potential of the proletariat. This is Trotsky.

The road of refusing to struggle against imperialist subjugation is the road to the Second International. I'll tell you what the outcome of that is. The main goal of communism, what is it, comrades? World revolution. To reject championing the national liberation struggle is the *betrayal* of that principle.

If the proletariat of the West refuses to support the neocolonies' fight for emancipation from imperialism, then there can be *no talk* of workers revolution. It means that we'll remain slaves, mere objects, under the imperialist masters, and I challenge you to condemn the Comintern for that. And in the imperialist centers, the workers will be wearing the chains of social-chauvinism. It will strengthen their bondage, so, no workers revolution there either. It's the road to catastrophe for human civilization.

That's actually the consequences of your position. And whatever little things you say about the past.... Comrade Norden, I respect your history and everything, but what you put forward today, there is nothing. How do you break the nationalists' stranglehold? How do you struggle to break workers from nationalism? How would you make a revolution? What is the material reality? The workers in Greece, they have suffered for centuries. Centuries. That's it. ■

Exchange Between the ICL and the LFI

The LFI Chooses Sectarianism

We print below the contents of a 3 November 2023 Spartacist supplement, including an introduction to the exchange between the ICL and the LFI leading up to the debate. This previously appeared in Workers Vanguard No. 1180, 22 December 2023.

We publish below recent correspondence between the League for the Fourth International (LFI), known in the U.S. as the Internationalist Group, and the International Communist League, which was first published on their website.

In accordance with the mandate of our recent international conference, the ICL reached out to the LFI proposing to hold leadership discussions between our two organizations and to explore possibilities of common work in defense of basic interests of the workers movement (see “The ICL’s Post-Soviet Revisionism,” *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 68, September 2023).

Since it is the ICL that provoked the unprincipled and shallow split which led to the creation of the LFI, we consider it our responsibility to do everything we can to bring clarity to what has been a confusing and disorienting rivalry. We are determined to reduce organizational and personalist tensions between our two parties and to engage in thorough and clarifying debates. As the correspondence shows, the LFI showed no interest at all in this. The LFI responded to our extended hand with a series of denunciations and accusations. The one redeeming part of their response is their proposal to hold a debate, which we have gladly accepted. It is planned for January 13 in New York.

We are confident that the careful reader will see through the demagogic and false accusations made by comrade Norden in his responses to the ICL. That said, the character of these responses also makes it easy to lose track of the

substance of the political questions in dispute. For the sake of clarity, we will elaborate on three key points.

Founding of the IG and Fights in the 1990s

The correspondence touches on various fights that occurred in the mid to late 1990s in the ICL. In its letters, the LFI argues that our reassessment of these fights is not genuine and not complete. We have already conceded that these fights were unprincipled and have committed to investigating in more detail those that directly precipitated the split. But this dispute is secondary. With their accusations and request that we deepen our review, the LFI buries what has long been recognized by both organizations as the main difference: the question of revolutionary leadership.

The main argument in *Spartacist* No. 68 is that both the LFI and ICL have had a fundamentally wrong understanding of the tasks of communists following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both denied the overwhelming dominance of U.S. imperialism in the post-Soviet world and the concomitant hold of liberalism in the workers movement. This made our respective proclamations for revolutionary leadership entirely hollow because they were not rooted in material reality and not defined in opposition to the dominant trends binding the workers movement to the ruling class.

Given that comrade Norden’s recent letters defend every inch of the LFI’s record, we think it is fair to assume that he also upholds the blatantly wrong tasks and perspectives both parties shared following the collapse of the USSR. These were codified in the 1992 ICL International Conference document, adopted four years before the IG’s founding cadre were expelled.

This is not merely a historical question. It is impossible to provide revolutionary leadership today without understanding that the post-Soviet order was defined by the liberal triumphalism of U.S. imperialist hegemony and that the current period is defined by the breakdown of that order. Today the LFI has no coherent explanation of what is happening in the world (agitating about World War III doesn’t count) and even less of the task of communists. The LFI is navigating without a compass, reacting to the erratic moods of the New York petty bourgeoisie, hailing the Communist Party of China’s lockdowns one day and tailing BLM the next.

In contrast, the document “The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power,” also published in *Spartacist* No. 68, provides a clear materialist explanation of the world situation and a critique of the Marxist left since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, in a world increasingly defined by sharp polarization between political forces representing the liberal status quo and those seeking to upend it, the ICL is fighting to provide a working-class path that cuts against all dead ends on offer. It is the inability of the LFI to put forward such an independent working-class perspective that runs through all our differences, whether over the Ukraine war, China, the black question, social democracy or the national question. It is these questions that we are eager to discuss and debate with the LFI.

On United Fronts, Blocs and Boiling Water

In response to our proposal for a private leadership discussion and “to engage as much as possible in common work when appropriate,” the LFI essentially accuses us of wanting to form an unprincipled bloc with them. They rejected the former, basically arguing that the simple fact of sitting down for discussion with us would be unprincipled. This is absurd and says much more about the LFI’s defensiveness than about our supposed opportunism.



Spartakist



Australasian Spartacist

LFI denounced our efforts to have NATO supporters thrown out of Die Linke in Germany (2022) and pro-AUKUS elements thrown out of Labor Party in Australia (2023). In both cases, ICL sought to intersect ferment in these workers organizations, while LFI proposed nothing.

They also refuse our proposal to explore common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement. To justify this, comrade Norden makes a hair-splitting distinction between a bloc and a united front, totally abstracted from any specific proposal. What matters fundamentally is not whether an agreement for common action is for a single event or a sustained campaign; what matters is that the terms of the agreement are principled. The truth is that the LFI has shown it does not want to engage in any kind of common action with us—whether in the form of a “bloc” or a united front.

- In Germany, the ICL called for a united front to throw NATO supporters out of the workers movement, a basic measure of sanitation as well as a tactic to expose the bankruptcy of pacifism. The IG denounced this while proposing nothing else to build a revolutionary pole amid the crisis shaking the left over the Ukraine war.

- In Australia, the ICL together with the Bolshevik-Leninist group applied a similar tactic toward the Labor Party, calling to throw the pro-AUKUS wing out of the party. We also advocate pursuing this fight within the Labor Party to exacerbate the conflict between its working-class base and its leadership. The LFI once again denounced our call while proposing nothing to channel the deep polarization over AUKUS in a revolutionary direction.

- In the ICL's 11 October letter to the LFI, we stated that “we think that we

can possibly find a principled basis to work with you on defense work against political repression.” With brutal repression against the left everywhere and much more on the horizon, there is a real need for common action in the workers movement. But the LFI simply ignored our proposal, probably dismissing it as some kind of ploy to talk to them.

- In the U.S., the fight against police brutality and black oppression is at an obvious impasse and there is widespread demoralization among activists. In this context we are building a campaign to “open police archives” to revitalize the struggle and drive a wedge between militant opponents of police brutality and the liberal leadership of that struggle. Once more the IG denounces us but are themselves unable to chart any path forward beyond proclaiming that socialist revolution will bring justice.

The worst example is the most recent one. In the context of the intense repression against pro-Palestine demonstrations and organizations in Germany, we appealed to the Internationalistische Gruppe (IG) and the rest of the left to take a stand in the form of a united-front forum built on the following three points:

- 1) Defend Gaza!
- 2) Down with anti-Palestinian state repression in Germany!
- 3) Hands off Samidoun [Palestinian prisoner defense group]!
Down with the banning of all Palestinian organizations!

The IG declared *agreement with our demands*, stated they would attend our forum *but refused* to support it and join us in any way *to fight* for these demands. While our comrades have faced police harassment, with two venues being canceled and a wall of hostility from German social democracy, the LFI did like the rest of the German left, proclaiming solidarity with the Palestinians but in practice doing nothing to confront the social democratic-led witchhunt. Meanwhile, even a small bloc of our two organizations could have put pressure on the rest of the left to *do something* in defense of the repressed Palestinian groups. This latest example shows the utter bankruptcy of the LFI. For them, drawing a hard organizational line against us is more important than taking up a struggle which is of the utmost urgency and *which they claim to agree with*. Comrade Norden is justified in still being outraged by the actions of the ICL in Brazil in 1996, but what about now? Who is pulling their hands out of the boiling water of the class struggle today?

These examples all point in the same direction. While the ICL is seeking to exploit the growing contradictions within the left and labor movement by fusing the defense of basic working-class interests and the building of a revolutionary pole, the LFI stands to the side and proclaims the need for socialism and a revolutionary party totally disconnected from the living reality of the class struggle.

Despite their response so far, we are still committed to pursuing common action with the LFI on the urgent questions facing the workers movement and urge them to shake off their subjectivity and sectarianism.

On Nationalism and Permanent Revolution

The main programmatic criticism the LFI raises against the ICL's new trajectory is that it is "driven centrally by the embrace of bourgeois nationalism." This is a serious claim, but it is not argued seriously. Anyone who reads our recent *Spartacist* will see that our entire approach to permanent revolution is based on *breaking the hold of nationalism* on the struggle for national liberation. Our central criticism of the ICL's past approach is precisely that it abandoned the struggle for national liberation to the nationalists. It is certainly possible that we have made mistakes in our arguments. But the LFI simply ignores any argument we make and just repeats as a mantra that we are motivated by nationalism. Comrade Norden does nonetheless make a few arguments of his own which are worth responding to.

1) The Anti-Imperialist United Front

To "prove" the ICL's class collaborationism, the LFI argues:

"You now embrace the 'Anti-Imperialist United Front' which in practice means political blocs with the bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries, the formula used to subordinate the Chinese Communist Party to Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang, leading to the 1927 Shanghai Massacre."

That the Stalinists and countless other opportunists have used the anti-imperialist united front to justify subordination to nationalism is an undisputed fact. But to conclude from this that the anti-imperialist united front *necessarily* means subordination to the bourgeoisie is just a cheap syllogism. According to this logic, one would have to reject everything Lenin and Trotsky have ever written because it has been used to justify class collaboration.

The point is simple. It is perfectly principled to take common action with nationalist forces against imperialism provided it does not lead to abandoning the fight for communist leadership. It is the latter that Stalin rejected in China and beyond by liquidating the communist vanguard into bourgeois nationalism. This betrayal did *not* lead



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September 1920: Delegates to First Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku, Soviet Azerbaijan. Convened by Third International to guide anti-imperialist struggle, over 2,000 delegates attended.

Trotsky to repudiate common struggle with nationalist forces. In fact, even after the massacre of the communist vanguard in China, he argued: "While maintaining its political independence, the proletarian vanguard must be ready always to assure united action with revolutionary democracy" ("Peasant War in China and the Proletariat," September 1932).

The anti-imperialist united front is not only principled, it is essential. In confrontations between imperialism and oppressed countries, it is imperative to take a stand with the oppressed. In fact, the LFI itself has often raised the need for a military side with bourgeois-nationalist forces against imperialism. What is this if not an anti-imperialist united front? The same logic applies to any other concrete action against imperialism.

The point of the united front is not only to take a stand against imperialism but to show in struggle how nationalism is an obstacle to liberation from imperialism. The importance of this tactic was clearly illustrated in the 2015 Greek referendum, which Syriza called over the EU austerity package to squirm out from between the imperialists on one side and the Greek masses on the other. To anyone but sectarian muddleheads—such as the LFI and the Greek Communist Party (KKE)—it was obvious that rejection of the austerity package would be a blow to the EU. A common front with Syriza to vote "No" was crucial precisely *because*

of their inevitable capitulation. Their betrayal of the people's massive rejection of austerity was a golden opportunity for the workers movement to pick up the ball where bourgeois populism had dropped it and escalate the struggle against imperialism and Greek capitalism. The rejection of the united front against imperialism in this context by the KKE (echoed by the LFI) did not advance class independence but in fact did the opposite. In the name of "class independence" from the Greek bourgeoisie, it left the mantle of "anti-imperialism" to Syriza, guaranteeing their continued hold on the masses.

2) The Democratic Dictatorship and Permanent Revolution

To support his claim that the ICL is ever more revisionist, comrade Norden argues:

"Your claim that Trotsky's program of permanent revolution put forward in 1905 was essentially identical with Lenin's formula at that time of a 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' directly contradicts Trotsky's own presentation in 'Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution' (August 1939) which contrasts them."

In fact, we do not argue that there was no difference between Lenin and Trotsky's positions but that there was an *"essential identity"* between Trotsky's permanent revolution and Lenin's strategic line." We argue that they had different prognoses for the course of the revolution in Russia but agreed on the fundamental strategic tasks. Is this a revision of Trotskyism wielded to

justify bourgeois nationalism? Hardly. Here is what Trotsky himself wrote in *My Life*:

“Many ‘old Bolsheviks’ said to me after I arrived in Russia: ‘Now the celebration is on *your street*.’ I had to argue that *Lenin had not come over to my point of view*, but had developed his own, and that the course of events, by substituting arithmetic for algebra, *had revealed the essential identity of our views*. And that is what really happened.” [our emphases in bold italics]

So why does the LFI—as our own previous propaganda did—insist on the fact that Trotsky was right and Lenin was a proto-Menshevik until 1917, and crucially, why does it matter today? Just as when the epigones raised a hue and cry over Trotsky’s permanent revolution in the 1920s, the differences we have with the LFI on this question are not historical but relate to the strategic perspectives for the revolution in neo-colonial countries. Stalinists revived the Menshevik program for a democratic stage historically distinct from the dictatorship of the proletariat to justify support for the national bourgeoisie. The LFI, as we did, inverts this in the name of class independence by rejecting the decisive role democratic questions play for revolutions in neo-colonial countries. Both views are meta-physical rejections of Leninism.

The entire point of permanent revolution, confirmed in living reality by the Russian Revolution, is that there is a dialectical interrelation between the democratic and socialist tasks. In countries of belated capitalist development, democratic questions such as emancipation from imperialism, the agrarian question and formal democracy will play a disproportionate role in the initial stages (yes, stages) of the revolution. What is key is that the proletariat must play the *leading role* in this struggle, competing for leadership against radical bourgeois forces. This is the essence of permanent revolution. Anyone who doubts it should read Trotsky’s *Permanent Revolution*—a book almost entirely dedicated to exposing the formal logic used by the Stalinists to conjure a fundamental difference between Lenin and Trotsky over permanent revolution.

3) Quebec and Language Laws

For the LFI and our other detractors, the smoking gun for the ICL’s supposed nationalism is our defense of laws in Quebec that make French the official

language. This can sound like a strong argument for those unfamiliar with the national question in Quebec—after all, wasn’t Lenin against privileges for any language? However, the argument falls apart as soon as it is put in context.

Quebec is an oppressed nation whose entire history since 1759 is defined by a struggle to maintain its national existence. The British and then English Canadian bourgeoisies both had the conscious policy of forcibly assimilating Quebec through anglophone immigration. It is not a revision of Lenin to uphold the right of an oppressed nation to fight its national and linguistic oppression. Lenin’s fight was first and foremost against the imposition of Russian—the *dominant language*—on the oppressed minorities of the tsarist empire. The LFI turns Lenin on his head by invoking his authority to oppose measures defending French—the *oppressed language*—against the dominant English language.

To oppose languages being given official status *in all cases* is simply reactionary. In fact, this position had previously led the ICL to oppose indigenous languages in Mexico being given preferential status under the guise of opposing privileges to any language! Or what about Haiti? The dominant language is French whereas the overwhelming majority of the population speaks Creole. Would measures favoring Creole at the expense of French be opposed by the LFI?

* * *

All in all, the sentences from comrade Norden’s letters that most clearly reveal the political method and program of the LFI are probably the following:

“In Mexico, you essentially prettify the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as anti-imperialist. A question: do you advocate that the ‘anti-imperialist united front’ in Mexico include AMLO’s party, MORENA? Of course, everyone in Mexico knows that AMLO is acting as a border guard for *yanqui imperialism*.”[!]

To Norden’s question, our answer is yes. Trotsky wrote that in the struggle against Hitler he was ready to make a united front with the devil and his grandmother (“The United Front for Defense,” February 1933, printed in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*). So clearly, if it were posed, we would make a united front with AMLO or even the right-wing PAN in

struggle against U.S. imperialism. The LFI wouldn’t...?

But more importantly, these few sentences reveal just how disconnected the LFI is from the actual tasks of revolutionaries. AMLO is one of the most popular heads of state in the world, precisely because he is considered a break from previous presidents who *were* simply yes-men for U.S. imperialism. Half a million people attended his rally celebrating the 1938 nationalization of Mexican oil. To simply brush off the anti-imperialist illusions he generates is not only delusional but profoundly disarming. After all, if “everyone in Mexico knows that AMLO is acting as a border guard for *yanqui imperialism*,” then there are no illusions to break. The result is simply to leave the hold of populist anti-imperialism totally unchallenged.

A similar methodology can be seen throughout the LFI press. Bombastic statements and orthodox jingles are used as talismans against capitulation while the misleadership of the working class is criticized from the left but not challenged fundamentally. There is a lot of huffing and puffing from the LFI, but you will not get an answer to the simple question: what is to be done? The ICL is a very small organization, but we believe we can provide answers for many of the key questions facing the international proletariat. We encourage our readers and supporters to attend the upcoming debate, where we will do our best to lay out our perspective

Talibang Anakpawis
Supplemento "Pagtanggol ang Inangip labanan ang umagap" 22 Pebrero 2024
Smash EDCA!
Build an Anti-Imperialist Front!

Talibang Anakpawis
Supplemento "Pagtanggol ang Inangip labanan ang umagap" 14 Marso 2024
EDCA Durugin!
Prente Anti-Imperyalista Itayo!

Mga tuta ng Kano sa kilusang manggagawa, patalsikin!

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to reforge the Fourth International in today's world.

LETTER TO THE IG/ LEAGUE FOR THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

2 September 2023

Dear comrades,

The recent international conference of the ICL has reoriented our party on fundamental questions (see *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 68, September 2023). This includes a review of our differences with the IG/LFI. As a result, the conference tasked the ICL to conduct “serious political clarification and debate with the IG” and to engage “as much as possible in common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement.” In line with this, we propose opening formal discussion between our organizations.

On several important counts, the International Conference recognized that the criticisms made by the IG of the ICL were correct. The fights that led to the expulsions of the IG's founding members from the ICL were characterized as unprincipled, as was the break in relations with Luta Metalúrgica/Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil. We are currently investigating the disciplinary measures taken at the time. The conference also described the central critique of the ICL made by the IG at its founding as “essentially correct”—that is, that the ICL had reduced the task of Marxists in the post-Soviet period to “keeping the flame alive against attempts to squelch it.”

However, when it comes to the courses taken by our two organizations in the post-Soviet period, we believe that overall they were qualitatively similar. When it came to orienting the working class, neither organization had a correct perspective because neither had as its central objective to break the hold of liberalism on the workers movement—the dominant ideology of the period and the main ideological brake on the struggles of workers and the oppressed.

Our proposal to open discussion is not to paper over our differences. Rather, it is intended to raise the level of political discussion between our organizations, starting from the central questions of revolutionary strategy for the current period. We are hopeful that engaging in such discussions can bring our organizations closer. The split provoked by the expulsion of your founding members from our party has been detrimental to the workers movement. The relations between our two organizations have been extremely hostile, while on most questions the political differences have been shallow at best. We believe there has always been—and remains—a significant overlap in the views of our memberships. If we are to stay divided in two rival organizations, it is our respective duty to ensure that this division is based on crystal-clear differences over the most important questions facing the workers movement today.

The world is rapidly changing and the fight to reforge the Fourth International is posed with burning urgency. Events are shaking the left. Theoretical and political debates among the most advanced layers of the workers move-

ment are crucial to reforging the Fourth International. But fundamentally it is fighting to provide revolutionary leadership in great world events that will be decisive. Doctrinal differences within the left can and will be overcome through common struggle.

In this sense, it is essential to engage as much as possible in common work when appropriate. The capitalists are keenly aware of the precariousness of their current situation; their response is to crack down on dissent and target minorities. There can be no excuse for disunity in the face of such attacks. Common fronts in defense work would be a modest but important contribution to advancing the interests of the workers movement and would put pressure on the rest of the left to do the same.

We expect that this letter will be met with a certain amount of skepticism on your part. As a first step, we simply propose to hold a private meeting between leadership delegations of both our organizations. The purpose would be to have an initial exchange of views and to consider options for further discussion. We place no preconditions on this meeting. On our part, we commit to seeking the utmost political clarity as opposed to the demagoguery and slander that have characterized our relations thus far.

We look forward to your answer.

Communist greetings,
Perrault
For the International
Secretariat of the ICL

LETTER TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST LEAGUE

27 September 2023

Dear comrade Perrault,

We have received your 2 September letter to the IG/League for the Fourth International and analyzed it in conjunction with the issue of *Spartacist* (No. 68, September 2023) that you refer to, containing documents from the ICL's eighth international conference. Most fundamental for us as Trotskyists are the programmatic issues. It is these that guide our response to your proposal for “opening formal discussion between our organizations,” which we will address below.

Spartacist Letters
No. 1 November 2024

A Journal of Polemic and Exchange

Read online:
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International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)



Spartacist Letters
A Journal of Polemic and Exchange

**Letters on ICL's
Reorientation**

In your letter, you write: “On several important counts, the International Conference recognized that the criticisms made by the IG of the ICL were correct.” Several passages in the recent *Spartacist* make similar statements. In the interest of basic political housekeeping, we must pose some necessary questions.

1) You state that “the fights that led to the expulsions of the IG’s founding members from the ICL” were “unprincipled.” Yes they were. The question is, what specifically about them does the ICL now characterize as unprincipled?

2) You state that you are “investigating the disciplinary measures taken at the time.” Does this investigation include the travesty of a “trial” of a comrade centered on outright fabrications, and the preparation of a second frame-up trial shortly thereafter?¹ Does it include the flagrantly chauvinist campaign against North African comrades who opposed the ICL leaders’ abandoning the commitment to publish an exile publication?² Or coming clean about the unspeakable witch hunt by the ICL in 1999 against the leaders of its Italian section?³

3) Your letter now also characterizes as unprincipled the ICL’s June 1996 “break in relations with Luta Metalúrgica/Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil,” and *Spartacist* calls for the ICL to carry out “a reckoning” on this unilateral break. But, again, what exactly about its actions does the ICL now characterize as unprincipled? The fact that, at the height of the heated struggle the Brazilian comrades were waging to oust *guardas* (police) from the municipal workers union in the steel city of Volta Redonda, the ICL stabbed the struggle in the back? It called to “pull our hands out of that boiling water” and demanded that the comrades resign their union positions, quit the union and leave town, and then, when they refused this shameful demand, the ICL broke relations. To cover its tracks, it launched a smear campaign which went so far as to brand the black Trotskyist steel workers as “dangerous hustlers,” and sought

1 See our July 1996 pamphlet *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*.

2 See “‘Chauvinist Hydra’ Devours SL/ICL: Some History Ex-Trotskyists Would Like to Keep Hidden,” *The Internationalist* No. 59, March-April 2020.

3 See *Back to Trotskyism!* (May 2016).

to sabotage their international defense campaign, calling it a “cynical sham” after the courts ordered the “search and seizure” of all copies of a leaflet their Comitê de Luta Classista issued, based on a suit demanding a list of all CLC members.⁴

The recent *Spartacist* claims that the ICL and IG engaged in “almost three decades” of “mutual slander.” For the

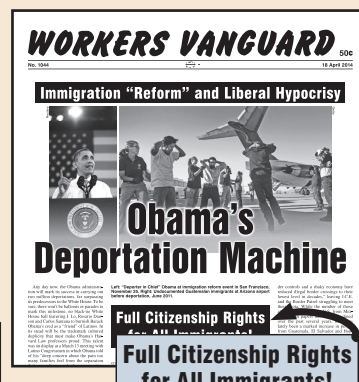
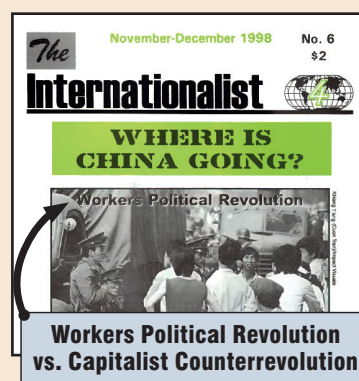
4 See “ICL Seeks to Sabotage Defense of Brazilian Trotskyist Workers,” reproduced in *Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists* (2010) and *Class Struggle and Repression in Volta Redonda, Brazil* (1997). Also, “Army Death Squad Targeted Brazilian Worker Militants,” *The Internationalist* No. 8, June 2000.

record, the IG/LFI *never* slandered the ICL. Our critiques have been scrupulously political and always based on fact. In contrast, the ICL unleashed a decades-long torrent of slanders against us, seeking to brand the IG as “anti-American” at the height of post-9/11 hysteria for our call to defeat U.S. imperialism in Afghanistan,⁵ “provocateur”-baiting,⁶ and much more. You mention

5 See “ICL Refuses to Call for Defeat of U.S. Imperialism, ‘Anti-American’ Bait the Internationalist Group,” *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001.

6 See the denunciation of this smear by Esteban Volkov, Trotsky’s grandson, in “Poisonous ‘Provocateur’ Baiting from the SL,” *The Internationalist* No. 16, May-June 2003.

What a Bad Split Looks Like



in passing (in a parenthesis) the “2010 Haiti betrayal,” without saying what that was—the ICL’s scandalous support for U.S. occupation troops—and its refusal to fight for independence for Puerto Rico, but not that it denounced the LFI for our principled opposition to imperialist domination. And as for the latter-day ICL’s chauvinist line on refugees,⁷ the word does not even appear in the latest issue of *Spartacist*.

Proceeding to the proposal put forward in your 2 September letter, you call for “opening formal discussion between our organizations,” to “engage as much as possible in common work,” and, “as a first step,” to “hold a private meeting between leadership delegations of both our organizations,” in order to “have an initial exchange of views and consider options for further discussions.” There is *no principled programmatic basis* for such formal discussions, private leadership meetings or common work. This is, of course, distinct from united-front actions (as opposed to the political bloc you are effectively proposing) when the class struggle calls for it, which we have participated in (and often initiated) with a range of political tendencies, including the ICL.

Such discussions, common work, etc. are the kind of steps that left organizations undertake when there is some process of political convergence. Some might think that since the LFI upholds the programmatic heritage of the Spartacist tendency when it stood for revolutionary Trotskyism, and you still call your international organ *Spartacist* (for how long?), that might indicate a degree of commonality. But under its new leadership, and for years before then, the ICL has turned its back on and increasingly formally renounced one fundamental Spartacist position after another. You claim that “the courses taken by our two organizations in the post-Soviet period...were qualitatively similar.” In reality, the political differences have continued to grow since the 1996-98 expulsions, and are rapidly accelerating.

You state in the current issue of *Spartacist* that the Spartacist tendency



Dreamstime

July 1967: Charles de Gaulle greeted by nationalist rally in Quebec. Banner reads: “Our French State...We’ll Get It!” LFI sees nationalism of oppressed nations as purely reactionary. ICL, in line with early Comintern, seeks to harness national aspirations to fight for revolution.

was supposedly “Deformed at Birth” on the question of permanent revolution—a central issue for Trotskyists. To advance this claim, the ICL (new epoch) performs a sleight-of-hand, seeking to turn Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution into a *stagist* program, in which the first stage is national liberation, even under capitalism, and even in the imperialist countries. On the contrary, Trotsky emphasized that in the present epoch, the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries can only be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry.⁸

In the same vein, you now embrace the “Anti-Imperialist United Front” which in practice means political blocs with the bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries, the formula used to subordinate the Chinese Communist Party to Chiang Kai-shek’s Guomindang, leading to the 1927 Shanghai Massacre. In line with that you vilify the Spartacist tendency’s record on Iran, when we warned against the catastrophic consequences of tailing the mullah-led “Islamic Revolution” as some kind of anti-imperialist movement, which led to the jailing

and execution of thousands of leftists. In Mexico, you essentially prettify the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as anti-imperialist. A question: do you advocate that the “anti-imperialist united front” in Mexico include AMLO’s party, MORENA? Of course, everyone in Mexico knows that AMLO is acting as a border guard for *yanqui* imperialism.

“Nation-building” bourgeois nationalism is the political motor force of the ICL’s escalation of its abandonment of the Spartacist programmatic heritage, publicly announced with the 2017 “Hydra” document. A key aspect of “Hydra” was its embrace of anti-democratic language laws in Quebec and Catalonia, which means repudiating Lenin’s crucial position against compulsory official languages.⁹ The ICL’s new, blatantly anti-Leninist line on the national question paved the way for a blizzard of further revisions, predictably now leading to repudiating the Spartacist tendency’s crucial position that in the case of interpenetrated peoples (such as in Palestine), a just and equitable solution to competing national rights is only possible through establishing workers rule.¹⁰ This is

⁹ See Lenin’s “Liberals and Democrats on the Language Question” (September 1913), his seminal “Critical Remarks on the National Question” (October-December 1913) and related works.

¹⁰ This was not some Spartacist invention, as you portray it, but was directly based on the Bolshevik experience in areas of mixed populations in Ukraine and the Caucasus.

⁷ See “Strange Encounters with the ICL,” *The Internationalist* No. 44 (Summer 2016 [sic]); “Spartacist League vs. Refugees,” *The Internationalist* No. 47, March-April 2017; “The ICL vs. Asylum for Refugees in Quebec,” *The Internationalist* No. 56, May-June 2019.

⁸ Your claim that Trotsky’s program of permanent revolution put forward in 1905 was essentially identical with Lenin’s formula at that time of a “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” directly contradicts Trotsky’s own presentation in “Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution” (August 1939) which contrasts them.

essential to the struggle to defend the Palestinian people and overthrow the Zionist regime, for example. Today the ICL's embrace of nationalism is extended, both retrospectively (on the USSR, Poland and the other East European deformed workers states) and currently on China.

The basic disagreements between us not only concern what you call "abstract doctrine" but also burning issues of the present day. Thus on the war of the U.S./NATO imperialists and their proxy regime in Ukraine against Russia, a way station toward imperialist war against China, the policy of the LFI is directly counterposed to that of the ICL. While the ICL admits that capitalist Russia is not an imperialist power, you denounce the LFI for upholding military defense of Russia against the imperialists. And while claiming in the latest *Spartacist* that "the ICL and IG are relatively close" on issues like China, in your previous issue (August 2022) you denounce us for characterizing the "Wuhan lab leak theory" as what it is: imperialist war propaganda against the Chinese deformed workers state.

As for the imaginary scenario of "common work," again there is no principled basis. From your blanket "Down with lockdowns" line (including in China, where they were very effective) to your recent articles and leaflets, each is more opportunist than the last. This includes calling to join the Australian Labor Party, the governing party that enforces racist immigration laws; the SL/U.S. statement on the

ILWU and UPS (19 August) declaring that the "real battle" is "workers vs. the Establishment"; and the openly class-collaborationist "Proposal to Rebuild the Movement" (28 August), calling to "unite the broadest possible forces" to "bring pressure down on all the liberal and progressive politicians who claim to stand for workers and for black rights" to fulfill the "doable" call to "open the police archives," which, it states, "can be done by any politician in office that is really on the side of black people." And then there is your abhorrent leaflet on the subway murder of Jordan Neely.

Having declared that the Spartacist tendency was deformed at birth, you deride Jim Robertson as a revisionist and have undertaken the wholesale junking of the programmatic arsenal crucial to revolutionary struggle today. We of the LFI, having fought over the course of decades to defend this legacy and carry it into the living class struggle, will not join you in your endeavor. With the ICL's consolidation of its break with the "old" Spartacism, you are now junking just about every distinctly Spartacist position from the days when it stood for revolutionary Trotskyism. This underscores an undeniable political reality: it is the League for the Fourth International that upholds the revolutionary continuity of the communist program of Lenin and Trotsky.

Having explained why there is no principled programmatic basis for the LFI to hold private "discussions" with you, we instead challenge the ICL to

a public debate. We propose that the two organizations work out the date and other details for such a debate, and that it be held in New York City, where both have their largest concentration of members.

Communist greetings,
Jan Norden
for the Executive Committee of the
League for the Fourth International

LETTER TO THE IG/ LEAGUE FOR THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

11 October 2023

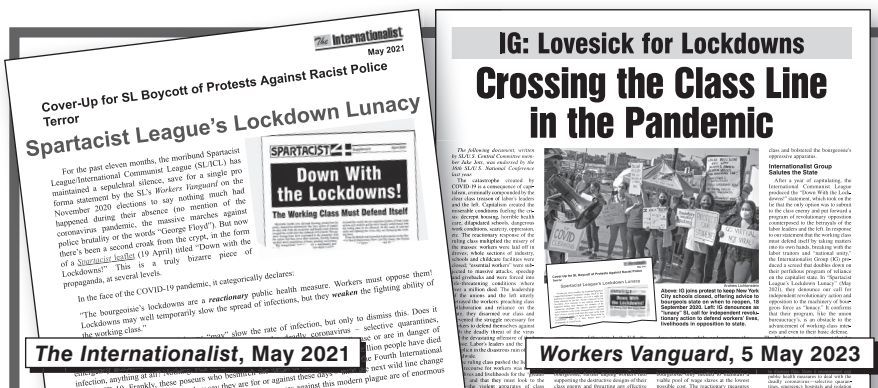
Dear Comrade Norden,

We regret that you have turned down our proposal for a formal meeting. In our opinion holding a frank discussion with another organization claiming the mantle of Trotskyism does not require any prior political agreement. In fact, we believe that such discussions can play an important role in clarifying differences and eventually forging political agreement.

In my September 2 letter I proposed "common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement" and "common work when it is appropriate." You reject this arguing that this is a proposal for a political bloc as opposed to united-front actions. We think this is a false distinction. Whether it is to "stop the fascists," "free political prisoners" or the 1921 UKPD "open letter," every united front requires some form of political agreement or bloc at least on a limited set of objectives. We think that we can possibly find a principled basis to work with you on defense work against political repression. Of course, we cannot have a united front on something we don't agree with. For example, it seems you do not agree on the desirability of throwing the AUKUS hawks out of the ALP or the fight to open police archives. If you did—and we certainly hope you change your mind—it would be entirely possible to work together on these limited objectives while still defending our respective strategies toward the ALP and black liberation in the U.S.

Now in response to your questions.

1) We believe that everything about the fight which led to your expulsion was unprincipled. Back in 1996 you



IG joined liberals and union bureaucrats in pushing bourgeoisie's Covid lockdowns, which fell hardest on workers and oppressed. ICL's program of independent struggle for workers' health, safety and other needs was condemned as "lunacy," exposing IG's touching faith in capitalist state.

agreed with the ICL's overall orientation. However, the fights with you and your comrades, whether over Germany, Brazil or Mexico, were all based on trying to show that you were in opposition to the rest of the ICL leadership. Since this was not the case, existing differences had to be exaggerated or simply manufactured through demagoguery and distortions.

2) Yes, our investigation does include the trials. There is a very long list of fights that were had in the last 30 years which we know to be wrong and damaging. We have prioritized the 1996 expulsion because of its political significance as well as the precedents it set. We are not currently reviewing the 1997 fight in the LTF. That being said, it was unquestionably a despicable fight, including its blanket rejection of an "iskrist perspective" for Algeria. As you know, the 1999 witchhunt of comrades Giulia and Carlo was reviewed in a 2004 ICC investigation. We have not re-examined the question but can certainly state that it was inexcusable to not communicate the result of the investigation to them.

3) On Brazil it is clear to us based on our own published account of events that we had no legitimate political grounds to break off relations when we did. That said, as you note there is much more to the question. We are currently investigating the claims you have made about the actions of our tendency in Brazil and are determined to account for the full truth, no matter how bitter.

In addition to the questions addressed above, your response raises several substantial political differences over the content of *Spartacist* No. 68 and our recent work. I will not respond to all of these in the present letter. On most points we believe that you either distort or caricature the actual arguments we make and/or present our position as somehow being self-evidently opportunist without providing any serious motivation or explanation.

To give only one example, you claim that we seek to "turn Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution into a stagist program" and supposedly repudiate that "the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries can only be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry." However, even a superficial glance at our article "In Defense of Permanent Revolution"

will show that this isn't true. Far from endorsing a "stagist program," we reaffirm that "only the proletariat, rallying behind it the peasant masses and the urban petty bourgeoisie, is capable of breaking the yoke of foreign capital, finishing the agrarian revolution and establishing full democracy for the toilers in the form of a workers and peasants government."

Finally, we will gladly accept the challenge to a debate. We agree to hold it in New York City. In terms of the time, we are relatively flexible. Our tentative proposal is to hold it in December. Would Saturday, December 9 work for you?

In our opinion, the best way to have a productive and clarifying debate would be to hold a full-day event where we can divide some of the various questions in dispute. We think this can be justified by the fact that this debate is almost 30 years in the making and numerous comrades from outside New York will surely want to attend.

Our proposal is as follows:

Main theme: The Fight for the
Fourth International
Today

Point 1: Revolutionary Leadership
from 1990 to 2023

Point 2: Permanent Revolution

Point 3: The Task of Communists
in the U.S.

We propose that the first point be longer than the two others given the breadth of the question and the fact that revolutionary leadership is at the heart of our differences. It is in this point that we propose to take up the question of China and the war in Ukraine. Permanent Revolution seems to us an obvious theme. As for the

point on the United States, we think it makes sense given that the event will take place in New York and we both have most members in the U.S. We are of course open to a counterproposal on your part if you have a problem with any of the above proposals. Once we have agreed on a date and questions to debate, we should proceed rapidly in arranging the other details such as a venue, a chair, the format, etc.

Communist greetings,
Perrault
For the International
Secretariat of the ICL

LETTER TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST LEAGUE

15 October 2023

Dear comrade Perrault:

We have received your 11 October letter. First, regarding the response to our queries about the ICL's investigation of its actions in the period that gave rise to our organization:

Your initial letter (2 September) noted that the ICL now characterizes as "unprincipled" the "fights" that led to the expulsions of the founding members of the Internationalist Group. As our 27 September reply highlighted, that statement, while true, is strikingly general. A much more specific accounting from the ICL is required if the intent is not merely to make do with a quick "confession" but to seriously evaluate the *meaning* and lessons of events that both you and we describe as highly relevant for would-be Trotskyists.






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Your 11 October answer, that “everything” about the 1996 “fight” against us was unprincipled, is based on the claim that both sides shared the same mistaken political outlook. In reality, the ICL purged us for fighting to implement the Trotskyist program, which it was abandoning—as shown dramatically when, after (and closely connected with) our expulsions, it stabbed in the back the struggle to expel police from the municipal workers union in Brazil’s “Steel City.” It was far from just a matter of “distortions,” exaggerations or specious arguments.

In the course of the cynical 1996 purge, the ICL ripped up one basic Leninist norm and party statute after another, launched a chain of willful fabrications, threatened to disaffiliate the Mexican section if it did not vote for statements the members knew to be false, publicly defamed our comrades, and much more, as we laid out at the time (beginning with *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*). For going on 30 years, the ICL sought to ignore and silence the facts. Those serious about revolutionary politics have a right to expect concrete and specific answers, after decades of snow jobs and smears from the ICL.

Your 11 October response to us states that the ICL’s investigation does include the 1996 “trials” (sic) as well as “the claims you have made about the actions of our tendency in Brazil.” This was not just “claims,” but facts laid out in detail at the time in materials collected in the dossier *Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists* as well as *From a Drift....*

We also asked about the 1997 campaign against oppositionists in the ICL’s French section, who after their expulsion joined in founding the League for the Fourth International.¹ You write that this “was unquestionably a despicable fight”—but that the ICL is “not currently reviewing” it. Why is that? Nor, to our knowledge, has the ICL made any public accounting regarding this blatantly chauvinist and colonialist campaign whose proclaimed goal was to “humiliate” these North African comrades and “demoralize” them, for opposing the disgraceful line the ICL put forward regarding both Algeria and France.

Your response to our 27 September letter notes that it “raises several substantial political differences” with the ICL’s current line and work, but does not seek to respond to them all. So we will make brief comments on some of what you do address.

No, the difference between united-front actions and a political bloc is not “a false distinction.” As explained in the fundamental Spartacist pamphlet *On the United Front* (1976): “In contrast to a united front, a bloc is an open-ended agreement to collaborate for broadly defined aims”—which describes rather well the perspective you laid out, for which, as we noted, there is no principled programmatic basis. A united front, however, is a joint action for concrete, limited objectives, and as noted in our letter we have initiated many such actions, inviting a range of tendencies, including the ICL.

You reject our statement that the ICL is seeking to turn Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution into a stagist program, and cite a phrase from the current issue of *Spartacist* as supposed evidence to the contrary. With bourgeois nationalism as the driving force for a group (as is the case with the present-day ICL) that still—for now—claims to be Trotskyist, an accurate presentation of permanent revolution can only be an impediment. For left groups undertaking wholesale revisionism, it is standard operating procedure to include a few “orthodox”-sounding phrases.

Turning permanent revolution into a stagist program is what it means to embrace, as you do, the “anti-imperialist united front,” which is the long-standing pretext for such a program and “theoretical” justification for political blocs with bourgeois-nationalist forces. That is also what it means to identify, as *Spartacist* now does, Trotsky’s permanent revolution with Lenin’s pre-1917 formula of “democratic dictatorship” of the proletariat and peasantry, and with the formulation that Marx put forward in 1850. When Lenin stood on that formula, he explicitly stated that it meant a “democratic, not a socialist” regime (*Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* [1905]); in April 1917, against those who sought to cling to that slogan, he wrote that “things have worked out differently,” and called instead for “all power to the soviet of workers deputies” (*Letters on Tactics* [1917]). With regard to the for-

mulation by Marx decades before the imperialist era, Trotsky noted: “Marx at that time expected the independent stage of the democratic revolution in Germany.... That, however, is just what did not happen” (*The Permanent Revolution* [1930]).

These kinds of revelations now proclaimed by *Spartacist* have been made many times in the past by erstwhile Trotskyist tendencies seeking theoretical cover for their rightward motion. They are part of a package including the idea that democratic demands rather than class struggle are the “fundamental lever for socialist revolution.” From China 1927 to Indonesia 1965, Chile 1973 to the Philippines now—and so many other countries—the real-world consequences of a stagist program, tying the proletariat to the “democratic”/“anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie, have been fatal.

Your letter states that we have presented various of the ICL’s positions as being self-evidently opportunist. Yes, that would indeed seem self-evident when faced with statements like that of the SL/U.S. (quoted in our 27 September letter) that the “real battle” is “workers vs. the Establishment” (a standard term that liberals use instead of class). This *openly* contradicts the ABCs of Marxism—based on the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie—and blatantly echoes bourgeois populism of both “left” and right. Then there’s the SL’s appeal to “unite the broadest possible forces” in a pressure campaign aimed at “any politician in office that is really on the side of black people” which is straight out of the handbook of popular frontism. Etcetera.

Lastly, we are glad that you have accepted our challenge to a debate. Given current events, December 9 would not be practical for us; we propose January 13 instead. We want to have the standard debate format (with presentations, discussion and summaries, extending to two rounds if needed) rather than diluting it into a day-long quasi-conference. We have no objection to the title you propose, “The Fight for the Fourth International Today,” and, as you state, details such as venue, chair, etc., can and should be arranged soon.

Communist greetings,

Jan Norden

for the Executive Committee of the League for the Fourth International

¹ See *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998.

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